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LIVET TILLBAKA

(Back to Life)

by

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Some of you say: "Joy is greater than sorrow,"
and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Khalil Gibran: The Prophet

...neither our greatest fears nor our greatest
hopes are beyond the limits of our strength - we
are able in the end both to dominate the first
and to achieve the second.

Marcel Proust: In Search of Lost Time

BERGEN-BELSEN

Tomorrow. Tomorrow I shall think. Tomorrow I shall look for anyone who may be left. Tomorrow I shall grieve. And perhaps, in my heart of hearts, still quite unconsciously: tomorrow I shall begin again.

Today I do not yet exist. My emaciated body is lying on the bunk, a husk without feelings, without thoughts. A consciousness exists, which has just registered the British soldiers: we have been liberated. My apathy is stirred by an imperceptible wave of well-being, but I am not yet capable of any expressions of joy. At this moment I am no more than a foetus in the womb.

Tomorrow I shall be born. After the year-long wandering through the dark underworld I have come to the end of the tunnel. Once again the sun appears on the horizon, I am alive. Or is this someone else? I shall not know that for quite a long time.

★

Bergen-Belsen, 16 April 1945

The thought that I must get up and look for my father wakes me. I do not need to get dressed, the prison garment has not left my body for a long time. I do not need to wash, there is no water. I do not need to eat breakfast, there is nothing to eat, there has not been any food for the last few weeks. I go out into the yard, relieve my bladder, and walk towards the barbed wire. Today it doesn't stop me; nor do the guards. The only uniforms I see are British ones, soldiers looking at us, uncomprehending, as if they do not believe their own eyes. Two worlds meet: the walking skeletons which the prisoners have become, and the soldiers who have never in their lives seen anything like this. Bread... water... plead the emaciated bodies with their dull eyes, and the soldiers give away everything they have, bread, chocolate, tins; their own rations, substantial soldiers' food.

I have no time to ask for food. I must look for my father. I still hope he is alive.

I am thirsty, and I see a woman, barefoot and dressed in rags, trying to drink from a rain puddle. A British tank stops beside her and a soldier reaches down his water flask. The woman clutches at the flask and I stop short.

'Are you thirsty too?' asks the soldier.

'Very,' I reply.

The soldier produces another flask of water and I put it to my mouth and drink greedily. I can barely remember the last time I was able to slake my thirst.

Before I come to the men's camp I pass a women's camp. Ingrained dirt everywhere, motionless bodies in heaps - whether living or dead it is hard to say. I hear individual words in Hungarian, and they make me look for acquaintances. I stumble over a heap of rags and hear a feeble whimper. I stoop, and see a woman, her face covered in several layers of dirt, broken by suppurating sores.

'Hanna, you don't recognize me,' says a scarcely audible voice.

No, I don't recognize her.

'Who is this?' I ask a girl near by, and am told that she is Etu, the sister of my boyfriend in Sziváros. It is not until a few days later when, infected by lice, I myself am hovering between life and death, I learn that she has typhus. What I believe I am hearing is that she is hungry, and I offer to come back with food.

'Not food...soap...please...soap...filthy...' she forces out, almost unconscious.

Soap, not food? I do not really understand. I suppose I have not been sufficiently dirty to understand her appeal as I should, but I promise to do as she asks.

I try to ask her if she has met any of my family, about the different camps she has been in, about her brothers and sisters, but she does not answer. She only repeats, over and over again, 'Soap, please, soap...'

A truck filled with people approaches, driving slowly along the muddy camp road. On the platform, guarded by British soldiers, sit the SS men, yesterday so proud and immaculate, now in ragged shirts, heads and feet bare, cowering, most of them with their faces buried in their hands. In the middle, dirty and broken, a gun pointing at him, stands Dr Klein, the most feared man in Bergen-Belsen. He was one of the doctors in the service of death who invented the most consummate cruelties to kill off the prisoners. No one's death was to be too easy. I wonder silently what his thoughts are now? Does he realize that justice has won and that the punishment awaiting him is well-deserved? How well does he understand what he has done? Does he see now how he has let evil take him over and control all his actions? What would have become of him in another age? What was it that made his wickedness blossom - was it Hitler's crude rhetoric, a difficult childhood, or an inherited tendency?

Some of our liberators hand out watches, rings, cigarette cases, trifles they have taken from their prisoners, while others encourage us to throw stones at these Germans who have been our tormentors for so long. I stop and look with satisfaction at the truck and its load. At last their power is at an end, the war is over, and I am alive. I no longer need to be afraid of their whims, to fear that an attack by a bored guard will lead to my death. Never again shall I be forced to line up for roll-call, never again will they stand behind me with a whip. One of the ragged figures beside me stoops for a stone to throw, but I have no desire to follow his example. I must go on, must look for my father.

My eyes are drawn to a heap of naked bodies beside the beginnings of a mass grave. Emaciated skeletons, their features now scarcely distinguishable, each of them : - once a beloved being. Perhaps at this very moment one of my fellow camp inmates is wandering round in search of one of them. For me this is simply a part of the reality which went with the past year. A few steps away a 'Mussulman' walks by, a woman of skin and bone. She wears a ragged blanket to cover her ribs, which stick out under the parchment-like skin.

She stares before her with haggard eyes and just before she reaches the heap of bodies she falls to the ground. Has she fainted? I come closer and see her open eyes still staring straight ahead. I call out to her, ask her how she is, but she does not answer. I realize that she is dead. I have not even a vestige of an idea that this might have been me. It is so obvious that I am alive, I do not even feel grateful. Only long afterwards do I ask myself how it happens that I have survived? Why me?

I pass torn-down barbed wire and come to another camp, where famished ghosts wander around, looking for food, for families. Here there are no barrack huts, just temporarily erected shelters, tents slung together from remains of blankets and other rags. I remember the Gypsy camp outside Sziváros, which as a child I had found so dirty and disgusting. By comparison with what I now see it was the height of orderliness. Figures squat and do their business on the spot, heaps of excrement lie everywhere. I hear words in Greek and hurry on, I must find the camp where the Hungarian men are.

After more searching I reach another area, where two ghosts are sitting in front of a hut. They are busy building a fire with a few dried twigs. As I come closer I recognize Marton and another man from Sziváros, busy baking a few potatoes. Marton is only a shadow of his former self; it is only from his eyes that I recognize him. When he catches sight of me he lifts apathetic eyes and hands me two raw potatoes.

'Have you seen my father?' I ask, stretching out my hand for the potatoes.

'Selected,' is his laconic reply.

My hand freezes in the air. So Father too is dead.

I am incapable of feeling anything. The potatoes.

I look at the potatoes.

My mind is now completely taken up with the potatoes, the potatoes which will soon be glowing, which I shall soon be able to put in my mouth. I know I am hungry, but I feel no hunger. Hunger is more knowledge than feeling.

The fire is smoking, it refuses to catch. As we wait we try to talk to each other. The words come slowly, sentences have difficulty in taking shape. It becomes more of a monologue, more of an account of something learned, questions prepared and repeated over and over again to oneself:

'Have you seen any of my family...? Mother...? Do you know anything about my mother...?'

The words leave Marton's lips like shot birds, falling lifeless to the ground. Questions that have preoccupied him for so long that now, when at last he can ask them, they refuse to come out clearly. He understands instinctively that his suspicions are confirmed: his mother is also dead. Silence enfolds us in a grey mist. The clouds above, the barracks around us, the earth beneath, everything is just one grey haze. Only death, to which we can no longer close our eyes, stands out in all its grim reality.

He and I are free. All the rest have gone. They will never taste the freedom of returning to their homes. We shall never again know the warmth of our loved ones, their care for us, from this moment we are alone in the universe. Why?

The potatoes are half raw but we begin to eat. We eat slowly, it costs a great effort to chew. I swallow and feel the pain in my gums. I stuff the other potato in my pocket and walk away. I must return to the block, tell Sara that Father is not alive either. And give her the second potato.

★

I was very ill. It was as if diseases had become Hitler's allies, ready to complete what liberation had interrupted. Ruthless, insatiable, the infections wrought havoc and claimed their victims daily. Now, when at last we could breathe again and rejoice in our freedom, more and more people fell ill and died. Typhoid fever had been my downfall, too. It was not until I recovered that I realized it was typhus. The Polish doctor, a former camp prisoner whom I sought out when I fell ill, was in such poor shape himself that he was unable to carry out a physical investigation. He simply listened to my complaints, and when I

complained of coughing and weakness he advised me to reconcile myself to death, something he himself seemed to be doing. On the way back to the barracks I went into the dispensary and the English doctor gave me cough medicine and told me to go to the hospital. In the town of my childhood the hospital was somewhere you went to die, and since Sara was determined not to accept the Polish doctor's sentence of death, she refused to let me go there. She took charge of me and cared for me until, bit by bit, she had set me on the path to recovery. A long convalescence followed, and slowly, slowly, my strength began to return.

During the time when I had been sick with fever the dead had been buried, the sick taken to the military hospital and the fit moved to the former German garrison, lodged in a three-storey house. After the camp area had been evacuated the British burned everything down so that nothing should be left of the old concentration camp. After my recovery I enjoyed listening to the girls' account of the splendid blaze which could be seen at a great distance.

The big, light living room in the former soldiers' barracks had no other furniture besides a little table with two chairs, and eight beds which also had to serve as seats. No cupboard, no storage place, but we had nothing to put away. It was not so very long since we had been crowded in with hundreds of others, so now that we were just eight girls sharing a room, we felt we were in a palace. The fact that we did not have to do anything contributed to the feeling. The cleaning was done by Germans, the cooking by the British. Everything was served ready. Three times a day, under the supervision of British soldiers, the German women came in carrying heavy baskets of food and containers of soup. The girls were always hungry and all they thought about was how the food could be made to last longer. One of them made expeditions to the surrounding area, looking for anything without an owner which could then be sold for food. Another charmed the British soldiers, who were glad to share out their own rations. I myself had not yet managed to think out a way of getting something to eat, when I heard that the Welfare Officers wanted interpreters. Communications between the

former prisoners and the British soldiers were difficult because not many of us knew their language. I had two terms of English lessons behind me, so now I saw a chance of being able to contribute to the 'welfare' as well.

The next day I knocked at the Welfare Officers' door. I was received by Mrs Montgomery, sister-in-law of the great general, who questioned me about my abilities. I answered as well as I could, and it was certainly thanks to the great shortage of interpreters rather than my broken English that I was taken on. My work was to be interpreting in the morning, making tea and serving it in the afternoon, and my pay was the 'crumbs from the rich man's table'. The office consisted of two rooms and a small kitchen. In one of the rooms, each behind her own desk, the two ladies worked: Mrs Montgomery and her colleague Miss Heard, and in the second, the sitting room, the officers met for 'high tea' every day at five.

The work was easy and pleasant. I did not have to wash dishes or clean up, because these tasks were performed by the prisoners of war, former SS soldiers. I could not help feeling satisfaction when I saw them scrubbing the stairs or cleaning up the cellar, always with the British guards at their heels. The tables were turned.

Both the women welfare officers and the British officers were very friendly and helpful, as if they wanted to make up to us for all the suffering we had had to endure. Every day someone would appear with cigarettes, chocolate or some other treat that I had not seen during the past year. All this, plus my wages, the milk and sandwiches left over from afternoon tea, I took home to the girls, and all these riches resulted in my being regarded as the 'family provider' in our little circle of friends.

One day there were some officers at tea whom I had not seen before. They wore different uniforms and spoke English with an accent. From their conversation I realized that they were newly-arrived representatives of the Swedish Red Cross, whose purpose was to take the sick back with them to convalesce in Sweden. My thoughts went to my cousin with typhus in the military hospital. Would she be

taken to Sweden? The next day I asked one of the British officers:

'Where is Sweden?'

'In Scandinavia, in the far north of Europe.'

'What's it like there?'

'It's a fantastically lovely country. And it's one of the few countries in Europe that escaped the war. Everywhere else the cities are in ruins and there are shortages of practically everything. Sweden still has most things, and a democratic government too. If you get the chance to go there, do it. I would.'

'They are only taking the sick, how would I be able to go?'

Next day I visited my cousin in hospital. She looked thin and drained, with feverish eyes, and clung happily to the orange I had just given her.

'An orange? Where did you get hold of such a treasure?'

'I was given it yesterday by an American officer who was having high tea with the Welfare Officers. Shall I help you to peel it?'

'No, I don't want to eat it, I just want to look at it. It's so beautiful! See how good it smells!'

She held the orange carefully, as if it had been a small child, lifted it to her face, sniffed it and stroked it.

'How are you?' I asked.

'All right,' she said, although she looked anything but all right. 'Everyone is kind, nobody shouts at me, nobody chases me out of bed. And they're always bringing me something good to eat, I feel really spoilt. Yesterday the doctor asked if I would like to go to Sweden to be looked after, but I told him that I did not want to leave you. Do you know what he said? You can come too! Would you like to? I'll only go if you do. By the way, isn't it very cold there?'

'Oh yes, it certainly is. Polar bears walk the streets, I remember someone once telling me.'

Now the thought of going to Sweden had come to life. The officers' accounts of that far distant country, the country that had not been at war for a hundred years, the country where there was everything, and where everyone was kind, came back to me. I could go there, too. But did I want to? I had not yet given very much thought to where I wanted to go. Freedom still had the charm of novelty. Rejoicing over my freedom in Bergen-Belsen, the plentiful meals, the work I enjoyed, with friends around me, was enough. The question of the future had not yet entered my consciousness. I was certain of only one thing: I did not want to go back to Sziváros. When you have once been kicked out, you do not feel you will be welcome back. Sweden? Why not? For a start.

2 Sweden

Two months have passed since our arrival in Sweden - two months filled with discoveries and rediscoveries. We exist as individuals, we are spoken to by name, we are asked for our views. We have regained our human worth. The new world around us is so different, so like and yet so unlike anything we have known before.

We are guests in Sweden. Many years later I read Pär Lagerkvist's book 'Guest of Reality'. Today I feel more like a guest of unreality. Nice people who look at me in a friendly way, talk to me gently, bring me food and little presents and - perhaps most important of all - listen to me and treat me as an equal. These people are unobtrusive, no one raises his voice, there are no children crying, no dogs barking. Clean and pleasant, order everywhere, although there is no sign of policemen. No trace of the chaos we have so recently witnessed, the buildings stretch themselves, proud and self-confident like cats in the sun, behind the lawns in the suburbs of Malmö.

I am filled with gratitude.

Ingrid and her sister, two Swedish girls, come to the fence every day and we make valiant attempts to converse in German. They bring gifts, a toothbrush, a looking-glass, a lipstick...trivial items which awaken the memory of another life. I look in the glass, stare at my poor teeth, my head with its stubble of slowly growing hair, my sallow face. I put on a little lipstick and wonder if I shall ever again see myself as a woman. Several of the girls have started their periods again, but I have not. Perhaps it will happen, now that we are not getting sedatives in the bread. Wasn't that what had put a stop to them in the camps?

Next day when I go to the fence to meet Ingrid, someone says: 'How pretty you are!'

Pretty, me? The compliment delights me, even if I can't really believe it. I want to express my gratitude, but how can I say what I feel in my inmost heart? I can't speak their language and my German is very poor. When Ingrid comes I ask for a Hungarian-Swedish dictionary to help me write a thank-you letter in Swedish. When I hear that no such dictionary exists I ask for a German-Swedish one instead.

'Dear Friend,' - it's not going to be so hard, after all. In German it's 'lieber Freund!'. Dictionary in hand, I look up the words one by one and write in Swedish: 'Rather friend!' Thank you - 'Tack så⁰ mycket' - I have heard that expression so often that I try to spell it out. After huge efforts the letter is fin^hished.

'Rather Friend!

Tacksamigi gift you nice to I.'

I don't think Ingrid ever understood what I was trying to communicate: my gratitude for her friendship, for Sweden's support for us outcasts, confirmation that we too belong to the human race.

*

Edit, a blonde seventeen year-old with dreamy, dark-blue eyes, had been born in Warsaw. She was tall, and thanks to the Swedish food her skinny figure already hinted at future beauty. She moved deliberately, carrying herself like a princess. Her hair, which was now growing, curled over her head, and in the grey flock of girls in the refugee camp at Lovön it was to her that all eyes turned. I attached myself to her, hoping that I too would be noticed in the shadow of her beauty. She too had been liberated at Bergen-Belsen, but the history of her sufferings was much longer than mine.

Edit had lost her mother at birth and had been brought up by her father's second wife, who would soon have children of her own and had little time for her stepchild. Her father was a businessman, often away, and Edit had to help with her little brothers and sisters before she had a chance to be a

child herself. She told me that she had never been allowed to sit on her stepmother's knee, and would still dream rather vague dreams of a closeness she had never known.

She was only eleven when war broke out and soon afterwards the family was in the ghetto. She found it hard to talk about her time there.

'How did you live in the ghetto?'

'It was all right at first, but quite soon it got overcrowded and food was scarce. We children had to crawl through the wire and get food in town, though it was dangerous, and if you were caught you were shot.'

'Did you do that?'

'Several times. I remember how proud I was the time I managed to take home some swedes I stole from a barrow. But still, hunger was not the worst thing.'

'What was the worst thing?'

'The constant fear. The threat of being shot, fear of the German raids.'

'Did you experience them?'

'Yes. I can still hear the dogs barking, the SS men screaming and shots echoing in the doorways: "Raus, alle raus - out, everybody out!" They went through the house, flat by flat, while we huddled together in a corner and tried not to breathe. The lorry below slowly filled up with petrified adults and weeping children, but for some reason our flat was passed over that time.'

'Were there more times?'

'Of course there were.'

'What happened then?'

'Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen - the usual route.'

She did not want to go on and I didn't insist.

Instead I suggested that she should come with me to see the ant-heap in the wood which fascinated me so much. It turned out that she was interested in nature as well and we spent more and more time together.

We made a habit of going to the kiosk every day to buy our elixir of life, a French loaf. One day we were spoken to in German by two young men who seemed to be interested in us. When we left we promised to meet them at the same place the next day.

'Edit, how did the dark one strike you?'

'Oh, I think he was more interested in you,' said Edit.

'Are you crazy? He was looking at you the whole time. Lucky you, he was very attractive.'

'All the same, I don't think he could be interested in a poor skinny thing like me.'

'But Edit, look in the glass. You're not skinny any more. Your cheeks have filled out, you are very beautiful.'

'Don't talk rubbish, the past years have stripped me of everything that might have been beautiful. No one would want me.'

'I wish I was half as beautiful as you are.'

Next day when we reached the kiosk the boys were already there, leaning against their bikes.

'So glad you came. Would you like to come out with us, there's a bridge dance over at Lake Mälär?'

'Bridge dance,' they said, what kind of dance was that? But the word dance brought back pleasant associations, and whatever kind of dance it was I certainly wanted to go. It was an eternity since I had danced, and I enjoyed it so much. But I mustn't seem too keen. I looked at Edit.

'Would you like to go?'

'I don't know, it's probably too far.'

'We'll take you there on our bikes,' said one of the boys, whose name was Tomas. He was the one who never stopped looking at Edit.

Edit turned to me and spoke in broken Hungarian: 'I don't think it will do'.

'Let's go with them,' I said. 'Just think of dancing again! Only a few months ago we wouldn't even have dreamed it was possible.'

Edit did not seem to be as eager as I was.

'You know we're not allowed to go out in the evening,' she said.

'Perhaps we'll get back in time,' I said, and continued rather hesitantly in German. 'It might be difficult, we have to be in by ten at latest, they lock the gates.'

'We'll run you back in time,' said Göran, the other boy.

'If we get back too late we can crawl through the wire,' I said, to convince Edit. 'There's a hole behind the shop.'

Tomas saw Edit's frown.

'I promise you'll be back by ten,' he said, looking imploringly at Edit. Still doubtful, she asked slowly:

'Do you think we should?'

'Yes, I do,' I said, very decidedly.

'Okay then, for your sake.'

We perched on the handlebars and the boys cycled off with us along winding woodland paths. It was still light, and when we heard the sounds of an accordion in the distance we knew we were close to our destination.

When the boys stopped and we got off the bikes we saw the glassy lake and a jetty, decorated with balloons, which stretched ahead of us towards the setting sun. Musicians in traditional costume were playing on the jetty, which was still bare of dancers, and a few children were playing ball. On the beach isolated adults began to gather in groups and there was an air of expectancy. So this was the 'bridge dance'. The players alternated between schottische, polka and hambo, all quite unknown to us. When the boys asked us to dance we had our work cut out trying to follow the unfamiliar and complicated twists and turns. To our relief there was an occasional waltz as well, and when I closed my eyes it felt almost like home, at our own parties.

Later that evening, when we were back in the camp, we sat out in the mild summer night, talking it over.

'Tomas says he loves me,' said Edit, after a long, dreamy silence.

'There you are. That's what I said all along.'

'Do you think he wants to marry me?'

'Do you want to?'

'I don't know. I'm longing for a family, I want to belong to someone, but I don't know if I love him. He's nice, but he's so foreign. He is tender and thoughtful, and it feels good that someone cares. Think how great it would be to have a home again, a husband, babies, what bliss. Do you think I'm stupid?'

'I don't think so at all. I'm longing for a husband, family, children, as well. And I want to get married. I almost did, although I wasn't in the least in love. But all the same I think I shall wait for someone I can fall in love with.'

'He has promised to get a job for me at the factory where he works, that would be good. So I could leave here at last.'

'That sounds good.'

'And he wants to invite me home to meet his parents. Do you think I should go?'

'Of course you should go. It would be good to go to a Swedish house, see what it's like, be part of a family, if only for a few hours.'

Edit and Tomas now met every day. They looked as if they were in love, but when we were on our own Edit's doubts reappeared. Although she had tried to adapt they were too different. Edit, still only a romantic teenager, and Tomas, a grown man with both feet on the ground. One day everything was fine, the next she wanted to finish it.

'Well, now it's over anyway,' she said one day. 'He wants to sleep with me - what's he thinking about?'

'I've heard that here in Sweden it's taken for granted that loving couples sleep together without being married. Ingrid said it's called Stockholm marriage.'

'I don't take it for granted. Not before the wedding night,' she said decidedly.

But Tomas would not accept that it was over and a week later they were engaged.

'Are you really going to marry him?' I asked.

'Yes, he's nice, and I'm so lonely. It feels much better now I know someone cares about me. And just think, to have a home of our own, someone to wait for in the evening, babies, doesn't it sound wonderful?'

'But do you love him? Can you imagine a whole lifetime with him?'

'I don't know. I hope so.'

Edit got a job at the Gustavsberg works, where Tomas was a foreman, and they moved into his little two-room flat near their work. Soon a baby was on the way and Edit was radiant.

★

Three weeks had now passed and we were allowed to go outside the camp. One Friday morning Sara and I went to Stockholm to take a look at the capital city. We walked to Nockeby and took the street car to Fridhemsplan, where we got off and continued on foot. Everyone who passed stared at us, but no one spoke to us, until we reached Vasagatan, where we were stopped by two men who asked: 'Amcho?' A Hebrew word, which we knew meant: Are you one of us?

'Yes,' we said, glad that someone was talking to us.

'What are your names? Where do you come from?' were the next questions, in Yiddish.

'Hanna and Sara Haller, we were born in Romania and came here from Bergen-Belsen with the Red Cross buses,' we replied in broken Yiddish, a language we did not know very well.

'My name is Moses Rubinstein, and this is my son David. We were both born in Skåne, but my father came from Russia,' said the elder of the two. 'Now we live in Stockholm. Would you like to come back with us and celebrate the Sabbath?'

Wouldn't we just! At last someone was inviting us to his home, at last we could revive the feeling of family fellowship, when the woman of the house lights the Sabbath candles and the man of the house blesses his children.

'Yes, thank you, we would love to come. When?'

'We eat at half-past five. Come in an hour or two.'

'Where shall we come to?'

'Do you know your way round the town?'

'We can try. What's the address?'

The address was written down, with a brief description of the route. We promised to be punctual and parted.

Cheered by our meeting we walked on, turned down Kungsgatan and stopped at every shop window. We marvelled at the wealth of the window displays, and could not help noticing our own reflections at the same time. Now I could see how we looked to other people: two poor, skinny girls in short socks and unfashionably short skirts, one still almost a child, the other an overgrown teenager. I could understand the pity I seemed to see in the eyes of passers-by and I prayed a silent prayer that I might soon be less conspicuous, more like the other girls walking past us. That I would not need to sense everyone's pity and hear the unspoken verdict: 'From ^{the} concentration camps.'

The time passed quickly and when we began to feel hungry it was already four o'clock. We began to walk towards the address we had been given on Söder and the church clock was striking five when we rang the bell at the Rubinstein family's door. A maid wearing black, with a white apron and a white cap on her head, opened the door and asked us in. She looked in some surprise at the new arrivals and showed us into the living-room. The family was already gathered

there and Mr Rubinstein introduced us to his wife, his daughter and two more guests. David greeted us like old acquaintances and told the guests about our meeting a few hours earlier in Vasagatan. He spoke English, which his mother evidently did not understand. She asked us to speak Yiddish, a language which the guests did not know. We compromised with German and were questioned about everything that had happened to us. They moaned and wrung their hands as our story continued, loudly assuring us of their great sympathy. They protested that no one here in Sweden had known until after the war what had been going on in Germany. When we finished our account they had comments to make, and it was not many minutes before they all began talking Swedish. Both father and son made valiant efforts to bring us into the conversation, but without much success. We felt completely left out. The guests' linguistic skills must have been poor, because all the family's attempts to speak a language we too could understand were disregarded. They simply went on speaking Swedish.

After a time we sat down for the old, familiar Sabbath meal, laid in the same way as in our childhood, with a white damask cloth, silver candelabra and two plaited loaves covered with an embroidered cloth. The mother lit the candles, the father blessed the wine, while I closed my eyes and saw my own mother before me, heard my own father sing the prayer. The food was also the kind we were used to, except that the first course, 'gefillte fish', stuffed fish, was sweet,^{an} the chicken soup contained no dumplings. The meat was good, but we were disappointed by the last course. The conclusion to Friday evening meals in my childhood was always stewed prunes. Now we were given something they called Ris à la Malta, which was greeted by the family as a delicacy, whereas in Sara's and my eyes it was everyday food, ordinary boiled rice pudding.

When the meal was over coffee was served, but as the conversation was mostly in Swedish, we said our goodbyes and left the family quite early.

Walking towards Slussen, we talked about the evening we had just spent. What we had longed for so passionately, what for a few hours we had believed to be

within reach, a feeling of belonging and family fellowship, had cheated us, once again it was all distant, unattainable. Sara began to cry: the memories awakened by the evening were too hard to bear. She was crying because she would never again know a Sabbath evening as it had once been, would never again feel her mother's love, her father's warmth, the family's support.

We took the streetcar back to Nockeby and had just begun to walk towards Lovön in the rapidly darkening August evening when it began to rain. We walked faster, but it was not long before a violent downpour descended on us. By now we had walked quite a long way along the country road towards Drottningholm and there was no shelter anywhere against the rain. We began to run and were soaking wet when behind us two headlamps approached in the pitch-dark night. We stopped and waved wildly to bring the big black car to a halt, but it simply glided past. I was looking glumly after it when it suddenly stopped and backed towards us. A uniformed chauffeur wound down the window, leaned out and asked:

'Where are you going?'

'To the camp at Lovön.'

He turned to his passenger and after a brief conversation he put his head out again and said:

'You can come with us as far as Drottningholm theatre if you wish, then you will have to go on on foot.'

'Yes please,' I said with relief, thinking that there we could have a roof over our heads until it stopped raining.

The uniformed chauffeur got out of the car, opened the door and lowered two seats facing the passenger. She was a beautiful, blonde lady in an elegant white ~~silk~~ dress which fell to the floor in broad folds. As we sat down she drew back and gathered up her skirt as if to protect herself from the touch of the guttersnipes. I looked at her sitting there, so fine and ^{un}approachable and wondered who she could be. I was expecting her to question us as other

people who met us did, but all she said was 'You are refugees?'

On reaching Drottningholm theatre we thanked her and walked off. We went into the building, where two women were sitting by the door. We started to explain our position, but as if they had been waiting for us, before we could ask if we could stay, we were encouraged to go in to the theatre. We sat down in the back row and when the lights went up we saw to our great astonishment our friends from Lovön. Soon we found out what was happening: Drottningholm theatre had invited the girls from the camp to a show that very evening. Relieved not to be out in the rain any more, we sat there, oblivious to our good fortune in visiting this theatre, unique in both Swedish and European culture. Just as children take everything for granted, so did we. Everything provided for us was taken for granted: music, theatre, everything we had missed while we were in the camps, the Swedes were now going to make up to us. In the interval the girl in charge asked why we had arrived so late. When we told her about the sudden rain, the black limousine and the elegant lady we had arrived with, she asked:

'Do you know who that beautiful lady was?'

'No,' we said. 'But it was so strange, she didn't talk to us at all. She didn't even ask where we came from.'

'It was not so strange. You were driving with Princess Sibylla, our Crown Princess. She will be Queen when the old King dies. I saw her come in in the middle of the performance, so it must have been her car that picked you up.'

Now I understood her silence, while at the same time I was greatly impressed by the democratic princess who had ordered her chauffeur to reverse the car and pick up the two little drowned rats.

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We have now been in Sweden for two months.

We are no longer guests.

In fact we never were, it was simply a misunderstanding on our part.

We are refugees.

We are welcome to stay in this dreamland if we do not want to return home.

Home, where is that? Our home was the little nest with our mother and father, who are no longer alive. Is the nest still there? The house may be there, but what use is it without the people who made it a home? Who is there waiting for us? The people who live in the house now, who once looked on in silence while we were transported like cattle to the slaughterhouse - those people certainly don't want to see us again. I don't want to go back to the bloodthirsty hyenas, I don't want to stay in Europe. Away, away, as far as possible, where there is no risk of being exposed ever again to the hatred which has claimed its victims for two thousand years. Australia - perhaps Australia is far enough away for me to feel something approaching safety. I am an adult now, I must decide on my own future. And I am responsible for Sara too. I have no one to turn to, I have no one to ask, I must listen to my inner voice.

Yes, I shall go to Australia.

'Sara, we're going to Australia.'

'To Australia? What are we going to do there?'

'I don't know. I hope I can get a job, and you can go to school.'

do it?'

You know what Father always used to say: "It has should not be, in one way or another." And after all othing can be worse.'

We went to the camp superintendent:

'We want to go to Australia,' I announced in German.

'I will help you to fill in the application forms, but I must tell you that it will take a long time. A lot of people want to go to Australia and they only admit a small number of Romanian refugees every year. You will have to queue up with thousands of others who have already registered.'

Queer again

'And what happens meanwhile? I can't just sit and wait, I must have something to do. I want to start to live again, here I am still a prisoner. We can't move about freely here, we are locked in.'

'That's not true. You're not locked in. The fence simply protects you from the curious.'

'It doesn't feel like that. I want to get out, I want to have the feeling of complete freedom.'

'You can certainly begin to work while you're waiting for immigration status,' said the camp superintendent. 'There are plenty of jobs available, a number of factories want staff, I'll put your name down at our employment office. Do you want to work in a factory?'

'Anything, so long as I can get out of here. And Sara? Can she get a job? She wants to start work too.'

'She's too young. She'll have to go to school. Next month the Aliens Commission is starting boarding schools for people under eighteen. Sara can go there.'

That fitted in well, both of us wanted to get out of the camp as quickly as possible. I was disappointed not to be able to leave at once, and envious of Edit, who would be going soon. If I had to stay in Sweden, I wanted to start work without delay. I hadn't the patience to sit around twiddling my thumbs, waiting for the employment agency's millstones to begin to grind; I was going to try to find a way of leaving Lovön for myself. I was no longer imprisoned and was longing to live like an ordinary person. Life in the camp was not for me, the fence that was supposed to protect us from the curious was still a fence, and I felt shut in. I wanted to look after myself, without an authority, even a kindly one, deciding for me. I wanted to get out into life, go on from where I had been interrupted, go to university, study, train as a paediatrician. Of course I realized it would take time, but I had to begin somewhere, the sooner the better. Certainly the communal life at Lovön was enjoyable,

so were the countryside around us and the closeness to Stockholm, that most beautiful of cities, barely more than walking distance away. But I had had enough of inactivity, I must take charge of my own life.

What luck that I met Annmarie, the girl in white overalls who came with the Red Cross to fetch us from Lübeck. We had been friends since chance brought us together for a second time in Stockholm. The next time I met her I would ask her to help me with my plans.

Annmarie was the same age as I was and could well understand my longing for independence. She herself had a strong desire for freedom and a feeling for justice which had caused her to leave home early. She was training to be a secretary, paying for her training with part-time work. Her parents were divorced and she had taken it for granted that she should look after herself. Although her mother lived in Stockholm, she never met her.

'I hate her, I don't want to see her,' she said.

Imagine having one's parents still alive, and not wanting to see them... I found that difficult to understand.

I thought of my own mother. Once I too had felt like Annmarie, and I found it hard to understand now that I could have caused her so much pain. 'You're not my mother, you don't love me. Admit it - you're my stepmother. What happened to my father's first wife, my real mother? Why won't you tell me the truth?'

I had never dared to put the question aloud, never dared to ask her directly. I only talked to my diary. On the day when she came to read it, she cried. I wasn't even sorry for her.

'You will regret it when I'm no longer here. One day you will cry,' said Mother, when I had hurt her once again with my brazen defiance. 'I only want what's good for you.'

I shall never regret it. You will never make me cry, was what I thought then.

Her dictatorial ways, which brooked no contradiction, her impulsiveness, the punishments, and what I then saw as unjust treatment, made me blind to her love. I took the authoritarian upbringing of those days for lovelessness. It was not until long afterwards that I understood how much love I must have received, since I had emerged unscathed from my passage through the underworld, and all the painful experiences that had been my lot over those years.

Annmarie could not know anything about all that I had learned since, or the pain of having lost a mother. She did not know how it felt to discover how right Mother had been when she told me that one day I would understand. Would feel loss, would know the injustice of my hatred, and feel guilt because she was murdered while I was allowed to live.

Annmarie was blonde and tall, with cornflower-blue eyes, a beauty which to me will forever represent the Swedish people. Kindly and unselfishly, she had received me, a foreigner, as if she had been my own sister. She lived in the middle of town, in a little one-room flat, with a cooker, and I looked round admiringly at her riches. What first caught my eye was a big bookcase stuffed with books. To my great sorrow most of them were in Swedish and I began to spell my way through the names I had never heard before: Almquist, Heidenstam, Fröding... I looked forward with intense excitement to a time when I would be able to explore this as yet unknown world.

A narrow bed with a soft pink cover and striped pillows nestled against one wall and a simple table with four chairs stood in the middle of the floor. A long-haired rug in its natural colour gave the room a cosy look, and a big black toy dog was asking to be stroked.

My eyes were searching for a stove, but did not find one.

'Is it never winter in Sweden?'

'Of course it is, why?'

'I can't see a stove.'

Annmarie laughed and pointed to the radiator under the window ledge.

'Haven't you ever seen a radiator before?'

'No. How do they work?'

Anmarie explained the mysteries of radiators and told me about the terrible winters in Sweden, the darkness and the cold.

'It's awfully cold here in the winter.'

'It couldn't possibly be colder than in Sziváros. When the snow comes and the cold strikes you're glad to be able to come in to the delicious heat.'

Now I remembered how it felt in the evenings on my way home after piano lessons. The snow crunched so delightfully under my boots and the stars glittered from the velvet-dark vault of the sky, while my nose and hands were turning into lumps of ice. I used to stop at the corner of the road where Moshe was roasting chestnuts in a rusty barrel. The hot chestnuts were warm in my pocket and helped to melt my frozen fingers.

'But there are no chestnuts here in Sweden and the snow doesn't often crunch under your boots. The sky isn't velvet-dark, either, it's more likely to be a dark grey sieve. There is usually slush, and you don't see the sun for several months. We get up in the dark and go to bed in the dark and quite often we have to have the lights on all day long,' retorted Anmarie.

I did not take her warning seriously. I simply did not want to believe that the cold could be worse than in the Carpathians.

'I remember a story my father told us about Sweden, about two little girls who lived on opposite sides of a lake. They were good friends and they looked forward to the winter. In the summer they could not meet very often, the distance was too great when they had to walk right round the lake. But in winter they saw each other every day. It took only five minutes to run across the lake. Is it true that the lake freezes so hard you can walk on it, or is it just a story?'

'It's true. When the cold has lasted for several days the ice becomes so thick that even cars can drive on it. Then the lakes are covered with people walking, skiing or skating on the ice.'

'What fun it sounds!'

Would I really be able to ski and skate again, as I once loved to do?

I looked forward eagerly to winter in Sweden.

3 Early Days

The next day, Sunday, I intended to go to Nockeby and take the streetcar to Stockholm to see Annmarie. I wanted to talk about my plans for the future and ask for her advice, as she was so much more experienced. But I suddenly remembered that she had once said you could not go visiting without warning, that wasn't done in Sweden. I should ring up first and ask if it was all right. Not like Sziváros, where anyone could knock at a friend's door at any time and guests were always welcome. I had already learned that the word for 'strangers' was used for visitors, even if they were your nearest relatives. In my former homeland the word 'stranger' had retained its real meaning: people one did not know.

I asked to borrow the telephone at the camp office, and in Stockholm Annmarie was waiting with the table laid.

'It's so nice that you've come just today. Yesterday I had a visit from a good friend from the States who brought lots of goodies. Now you can also try all the things we still can't get here in Sweden.'

The containers on the table spoke for themselves. Coffee, chocolate, cigarettes, bananas and a bottle of brandy made me stretch my eyes.

'Come on, I'll make coffee, then we can talk.'

I watched while Annmarie made coffee, a process that was new to me. I remembered how Mother used to boil up water with a few ground coffee beans and chicory in a saucepan, and my eyes followed Annmarie now as she poured the boiling water into a jug containing ground coffee. She let it settle for a while, added a few drops of cold water, and the coffee was ready to drink. We sat down on the sofa, poured the coffee into our cups and opened the box of chocolates. Annmarie put the new jazz record on the gramophone, which was also a present from America, and lit a cigarette.

'Wouldn't you like one?' she asked.

'No, I've never smoked.'

'Try it, it tastes good.'

Perhaps I ought to try it, I thought. It looked so elegant when Annmarie lit a cigarette - so worldly. I felt like the little country girl, like Cinderella with a princess. Dull, drab and down-at-heel. Perhaps smoking would help me to feel less out of place. I looked at the newly-opened white packet and read 'Camel'. The same brand as they had in Bergen-Belsen after the liberation. Although several of my companions did smoke, I had never let myself be tempted. Cigarettes were hard currency, to be used as money. Bread, articles of clothing, everything had its price in cigarettes. I glanced at my watch and remembered the box under my bed from which one fine day the cigarettes had disappeared. The saved-up cigarettes, like everything else, were common property, and on my birthday the girls wanted to surprise me with a present, and bought a watch with them. But now they only had a use to someone who smoked, so why shouldn't I try one?

Hesitantly I took a cigarette from the packet with the camel on it, and Annmarie helped me to light up. I breathed in the smoke and immediately started coughing.

Annmarie burst out laughing.

'You must take care. You're not supposed to breathe in the smoke as deeply as that. You have to get used to it before you inhale.'

No, smoking was no fun. It didn't taste nice, it only made me cough.

I put out my cigarette and began to tell her about my conversation with the staff at Lovön about moving to Australia, and that meanwhile I wanted to work in Stockholm. Could Annmarie help me to find work, and as soon as possible? She took out her newspaper and looked down the 'situations vacant'.

'It will be best for you to work in a family, so that you'll have somewhere to live,' she said.

I wanted to protest, I have never liked housework. That had been the cause of the constant quarrels with my mother. I didn't want to help, and what I did do was always done badly. When I gave it more thought I realized that to work in a family would have its advantages. I must start somewhere and it didn't matter

if it was in a factory or doing housework. But I had no intention of staying there. I knew that I wanted to achieve everything I had dreamed about in my teens: getting educated, being able to help my fellow-men, travelling to foreign countries. But first I had to get away from the camp.

The paper was full of advertisements, 'Home help wanted', up and down the columns. Annmarie explained that nowadays no Swedish girls wanted to do housework, and the spoilt ladies in the big flats were desperate. She did not think it would be difficult for me to get a job.

After a number of unsuccessful telephone calls it turned out that, after all, people were not keen to take on a girl who did not speak Swedish. Some came right out with it, others asked us to ring back. I was beginning to lose heart, when Annmarie caught sight of an advertisement for an English-speaking governess for seven year-old twins. Our hopes rose again and we rang the number given in the newspaper. The lady who answered was interested and wanted to see me next day. I hugged Annmarie and in spite of the fact that my English was still poor, felt that the job was already mine. What was it that I had learned at the seminary about teaching seven year-olds? I must not be too strict, I told myself, and began to plan the first lesson.

Annmarie gave me good advice and warned me before we parted to be sure to arrive for the appointment in good time. Punctuality was expected in Sweden.

It was late in the afternoon when I left Annmarie. I crossed Stureplan and walked towards Tegelbacken. Should I take the Drottningholm bus, or the Number 12 to Nockeby? As I thought about it I was mentally counting my meagre assets. It was a long walk from the streetcar stop in Nockeby to the camp at Lovön, but it cost only 40 öre, while the bus cost 1 krona 20. Our pocket money, 3 kronor 50 per week, had to cover so much. And bread continued to have the highest priority. I could still not get enough of the soft white French loaf with the crisp golden-brown crust which we bought at the refugee camp kiosk. But now I

wanted to get back to my companions quickly, to tell them about the telephone conversation and my hopes of a successful outcome to the next day's meeting. I would let fate decide. If the streetcar was there, I would take it.

At the Tegelbacken crossing the booms were down and the traffic light flashed red. I stopped to look round, when the warning bells began to ring and the puffing train appeared at a distance. The traffic stopped, and I stood still, pictures of trains and stations chasing round my brain. All the trains of my childhood that I had once gazed after longingly, the train which swallowed up my family and changed my life, and the train to freedom in Sweden. The station at Sziváros, the station at Auschwitz and the station at Tegelbacken, which Annmarie called 'Red Square'...

Then I saw that the Number 12 had arrived, so I went over to it. I climbed in and sat on the seat nearest the window while the booms rose with a bang. I had scarcely had a chance to have a look at my neighbour on the seat when the streetcar bell rang and it started up with a jerk.

Nobody spoke, only the conductor's voice saying 'Tickets' broke the silence. He stopped with his big bag in front of the passengers and I handed over my coins for Nockeby.

Round me sat fathers on their way home, buried in their evening papers, mothers with shopping bags and one or two younger girls. My happiness at the promising telephone conversation was still keeping me warm, but when I looked at all these expressionless faces I tried to adapt my facial features to theirs. No one looked me straight in the eye, but I noticed how most of them peeked out of the corners of their eyes. I paid no attention, I was already used to the Swedes regarding us with surprise and curiosity: rare birds, dropped from the sky. But for them to speak to us was becoming rarer still.

The streetcar rattled on at an even pace, more and more people getting on at the stops, and I stared curiously at everything and everyone. The sailing boats under Traneberg Bridge, fluttering, colourful butterflies, filled me with longing.

Shall I ever sit in a boat like that? I would not even have dared to dream of owning one.

I read the signs which I thought showed the name of the stops: Thorildsplan, Kristineberg, Alvik, Ladies Hairdressing, Restaurant, and was surprised that the last two occurred a number of times. Was it possible that several stops had the same names? It must be very confusing. In the station the streetcar stopped in front of the sign saying 'Ladies Hairdressing' or 'Restaurant', ^{in Swedish} and I practised saying the unfamiliar words to myself. It would be several months before I learned the meaning of the words.

A red-haired, rather plump lady got in at Fridhemsplan and sat on the seat opposite me. She looked at me for a long time without saying anything. After a while she asked in German:

'You are a refugee?'

The question had puzzled me every time I heard it. I have never regarded myself as a refugee, I have never taken refuge. I was transported from my own country by force, I was kept prisoner in Germany and after the liberation I was invited to Sweden. Why should I be called a refugee? But I had learned to accept that description too.

'Yes.'

'When did you come to Sweden?'

'Two months ago.'

'What camps were you in?'

'I was deported to Auschwitz, then I was moved to various ^{labour} camps round Hamburg and finally to Bergen-Belsen.'

'I know you have had a bad time,' she said, nodding pensively.

'Do you know Germany?' I asked.

She replied with some hesitation:

'A little bit, I was in Hamburg during the war as well. I sang a little. There and in Berlin.'

I became thoughtful. I did not really feel that I wanted to go on with the conversation. She had been singing in Hamburg while I was dragging 20-kilo cement sacks along. She had been singing in Berlin while my parents were being gassed in Auschwitz. Perhaps she had taken the train to Hamburg on the very winter's day when I was shovelling snow in front of the Central Station, but she certainly had not seen me, nor the other hollow-eyed girls in prison clothes. She, perhaps at the peak of her career, and we, at the lowest point of society. Why did I think she should have looked at us? No, she had no reason to do so, and it would not have helped me, after all.

And now that our paths have crossed again, what is she thinking? Is she sorry for me? No, probably for herself. Perhaps she regrets the defeat of Germany, and being forced to interrupt a brilliant career in Hamburg and Berlin.

Then the streetcar stopped at Nockeby. I got out and began to walk to Drottningholm.

It was not the first time I had walked through Drottningholm Park but I was filled with delight all over again at the sight of the grass, the beautiful trees, the flowers and the sound of the birds twittering. I could not decide which path to take. I preferred the English park, but the way through the French one was shorter. I walked along the raked pathway, finding it difficult to believe that this was me. When I came to the maze I saw myself in a crinoline, with a parasol, conversing with my gentleman friend in a powdered wig, with a silk cravat and pointed shoes. I was telling him about everything I had done that day, that I had survived, that I belonged to the human race again, that I was on my way to getting a job. But soon my happiness was clouded by the question why I had survived and he had not? Today I was unwilling to accept the conclusion I had repeated so many times before: 'Whom the gods love die young'. That the most fortunate were those who were no longer alive, those who had escaped the daily suffering. Today I did not agree with that. Why could he not walk here listening to the bird song, why could my mother and father not see this sunset?

I stopped when a little bird with red breast feathers flew up ahead of me. I had never seen such a beautiful bird. His twittering carried my sorrowful thoughts away, leaving me with a vague feeling of hope.

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I hovered for several weeks between confidence and hopelessness. I did not get the governess's job, the family were afraid to entrust their children to someone with my background. 'Who knows what she has done? After all it can't be true that innocent people were put in concentration camps!'

People who have lived in peace for a hundred years find it difficult to believe in evil. They look for causes, explanations, logic.

How could I expect the Swedes to believe that evil exists, when not even we Jews wanted to believe it? We, who can actually look back on two thousand years of persecution. Why does one not learn from others' experience? Do we at least learn something from our own? I still hope so. History repeats itself all the time, there is nothing new under the sun. Could what happened to us be repeated? No, never, and certainly not in Sweden. The world has learned a lesson, people have realized that once you begin to hate, you lose yourself. German anti-Semitism led to the collapse of the German state. There will be no more anti-Semitism in future anywhere in the world. From now on everyone will understand. That was what I believed then.

Finally I did get work, after all, as a maid, at 80 kronor a month. Now it was only Sara's future that worried me. Although she had grown up during the past year, in her heart of hearts she was still a child. She did not want to go to school, she did not want to be separated from me, she wanted to start work.

'What's the point of going to school, can't I be allowed to feel that we're free too? Do I have to move to a new prison, obey stupid teachers, be punctual? Don't you think I've had enough of that?'

'You're not eighteen yet and your schooling was interrupted at thirteen, you must realize that you still have a lot to learn. You can't be a maid or a

factory worker all your life. I'm quite sure it will be fun at school. You'll meet people your own age, you'll learn the language and you'll have the chance to move forward, be educated and become something.'

'I don't believe it, and I don't want to. I want to look for work, I want to earn money, and I want to be able to be with you.'

'At least try it. I promise you can stop if you don't like it.'

It took a lot of persuasion before Sara agreed to go off to Smedsbo, the boarding school in Dalarna.

The evening before I was supposed to pick up my little bundle and move from Lovön, the seven girls in the barracks organized a little feast. We cried and laughed, remembered the difficult days and planned the golden future that surely awaited us. I was the first to go, but my friends' turn would be coming soon.

I arrived at a nice little private house in Enskede, where a friendly woman showed me round and explained everything that I was expected to do. I was to clean, help the mother of the family with her jobs, and take the children for walks. The family consisted of five people, the grown-ups spoke a little German. I was given a small room, which would be mine alone. Its six square metres seemed to me positively regal.

I was a free person at last, looking after myself, earning money and part of a family. So I thought. But it took me only a few days to realize that the family did not share my outlook, they did not see me as a member of the family. The mother was friendly, but not particularly warm, the father quite uninterested, barely speaking to me. The children were pretty but shy, and made no response at all to my expressions of affection. Much as I disliked housework, I strove to do everything to their satisfaction. My mother's exhortations, her voice telling me what to do and how to do it, rang in my ears. Now, when she was no longer alive, I listened, whereas then I had always been defiant. I could never again earn my mother's praise and tenderness, but through obedience and hard work I might be able to buy myself a little warmth, a little closeness.

I got up early and worked hard until the last of the washing-up was finished, even when the family had late guests. When they went out in the evening I left little 'good night' notes on the mother's pillow, just as I had always done at home, as a child.

A seven-hour working day was something I had never heard of, and I knew nothing about statutory free time.

★

I had my residence permit now and the next day I would be going to the ladies' outfitters at Söder to buy clothes. Everyone who had a residence permit also received a voucher for clothing, a coat, a pair of shoes and a change of underwear. This was to be my first purchase as a free person in this new country. I rang up Annmarie and asked her to come with me and help me choose the nicest dress and the nicest coat.

Annmarie came with me and watched patiently while I tried on one dress after another. I had trouble making up my mind: one was too simple, another too showy, one too colourful, another too tame. At last, after lengthy pondering, I chose a dress with big black and yellow checks, a fitted waist and a circular skirt, and a black winter coat. I looked at myself in the glass and was pleased with the result. I felt very elegant in my new outfit and thought that now I would no longer feel ashamed when Annmarie and I were going out to eat at the milk bar.

It had taken a good deal of time to find the right clothes, and now only the shoes and underclothes were missing. This was much easier, because I knew I wanted a pair of black pumps and it was simply a question of finding the right size. The choice of underclothes gave me no problems either, I had only to point to the pink vest and briefs and ask them to wrap it all up. When everything was ready I took the package from the shop assistant, feeling slightly giddy. To own so many new things... I put out my hand and thanked her solemnly in German. Annmarie looked surprised and laughed.

'You're so funny. You haven't been given a present. You don't shake hands in a shop, you just say thank you!'

The new dress would only be worn for best. For every day I had gone around in a pair of dark blue trousers with a side fastening which I had been given by an English sailor after our liberation at Bergen-Belsen. I did not know that the mother was ashamed of the maid in trousers until she produced one of her old skirts. She thought only bad girls went around in trousers and asked if I had no skirt to wear. When I replied in the negative she offered me the skirt on loan, to be worn when I was going out with her children. It did not suit her that her neighbours should see a trousered girl taking her children to school.

Charity. Not belonging. How could I ever have thought that rich people who had been comfortable all their lives would be able to understand someone who had gone through hell?

'We had a hard time too, do you know there was a period when we only had herring for dinner? We still have shortages, you can see how many things can only be had with coupons even now: butter, bread, sugar, meat, milk, washing powder, you can't even buy porridge oats without them.'

The hardest things to bear are always those you suffer yourself.

I had approached the family with my heart in my hands, but they were unable to accept it. Pity was all they could offer, and even that was better than the lightly disguised condescension which I also often encountered.

'How clever you are, how well you speak Swedish!' they would say, when I could scarcely use the language at all.

But I did not want pity. And I did not want to be regarded as 'clever'. I wanted to be judged by the same standards as a Swedish girl. I was going to become Swedish. I would get my education, I would show that... Then I remembered my agonies as a teenager, when I wanted to do so much but could not manage to sit and attend to my lessons. I remembered the lines I had so often written in my diary:

'I want to be able, but I can't be willing. Dear God, help me to be willing, so that I shall be able to do all the things I dream about.'

And I struggled on with my work as a housemaid.

So many things were strange in this new country. For instance, all the things you don't do in Sweden:

You don't shake hands with a shop assistant.

You don't talk loudly.

You don't call on someone without being invited.

You don't show your feelings.

You don't pick flowers hanging outside the fence.

You don't talk to your neighbours or to people on trains.

You don't eat biscuits without having something to drink.

Nights that never turn into nights.

Days that pass into dusk which passes into daylight...and later, nights that can't let go, the electric light that is never switched off,

the wonderful food: sweet bread, baked potatoes, blood pudding,

the difficult language, the cause of so many misunderstandings,

people without body language, who give you no chance to 'read' them,

a 'perhaps' which means 'no', a 'yes' which means 'perhaps',

people afraid of confrontation,

afraid of daring to think anything.

Leisurely, good-hearted people, ready with their ingenuousness, naivety, fear of conflict, dwelling on the past. And something I did not discover until much later: jealousy.

People so different from my former countrymen, every one of whom had his own view of everything that happened, to whom confrontation was a normal part of everyday life, whose squabbles and fights were followed by making-up and kisses, and who were always quick to delight in the success of others.

And the exception, Annmarie. Who offered me her friendship, who had helped me in every way despite the fact that she herself was not very well off. When Mrs Svensson wanted me to give back the skirt she had lent me, it was Annmarie who gave me one of her own dresses, and when I needed ten kronor, it was she who offered a loan. We had a great deal in common, both of us were interested in art, music, literature, and we could sit and talk for hours. Although we were almost the same age, she was so much more mature, more experienced. I admired her intelligence, her independence, her sexual freedom. I looked up to her, she was my idol.

On Wednesday evening I usually met my friends from Lovön at the Ogo café. Most of us were now working for families and we were free on Wednesday evenings. Maids' Saturday, as we discovered it was called.

'I was sacked today,' said Bella. 'Mrs Carlsson couldn't find her pants and accused me of taking them.'

'And did you?'

'No, but I chucked them in the bin.'

'Why?'

'They were bloody and they disgusted me. She expected me to wash them. What a cheek, expecting other people to wash your own bloody pants! She could have done it herself. When we were children no one could use the maid for that kind of thing. Mother went crazy if I as much as asked the girl for a glass of water. And here the woman has to be waited on like a princess.'

'But you get paid for it?'

'Nobody ever said anything about bloody pants. But I can imagine giving her a glass of water, if she asks for one.'

'What about you, how are you getting on?' she asked, as she attacked her cream cake.

'Not too bad,' I said. 'But they're not particularly nice to me.'

'My family is awfully nice. I've been given a dress and I can invite you back on Sunday. Will you come?' asked Susanne.

'Of course,' we chorused.

'Mrs Olsson knows it's my birthday, and she's promised to let me give you fruit juice and buns.'

'That's nice of her,' said Lola. 'To serve up buns and fruit juice she's got to give up sugar, flour and butter coupons. In my family they're terribly stingy, they're all jealous of their own coupons. Everyone buys his own pot of jam and his own packet of butter. They would never even think of sharing it. Every morning I just have to look on, because of course they don't think of offering me anything. But they've taken my coupons,' she said, sighing.

'It doesn't matter, though,' she added. 'I'm not going to work for them all my life. Soon the time will come when I too can eat butter and jam - as much as I like!'

In spite of these drawbacks the early days in Sweden were wonderful. The little peculiarities of the Swedes appeared to me as something exotically different which I had to learn to accept.

Sara was also beginning to enjoy herself at the boarding school in Dalarna. But the early days were difficult. She refused to join in the lessons, and her first letter worried me.

'Dear Hanna,

It's very beautiful here in Smedsbo, the autumn leaves are still glowing on the trees and I take long walks. There is an inland lake close by and it's still warm enough for a dip. We live in barracks near the village, which consists of just a church and one or two houses. So there's nothing to do here. The girls are nice, but the teachers are daft. They say we don't have to go to school if we don't want to. And they think we should decide for ourselves what we would like, we should have a sort of self-government. The pupils have to have a general meeting once a week and decide on the rules for the school themselves.

It's never going to work. Who wants to study if they don't have to? If the teachers don't decide, everyone will do exactly as they please, there will never be any order. It's a waste of time being here, can't you arrange things so that I can come back as soon as possible?

Big hug from your wistful sister.

But only a week or two later things had changed:

Hi,

Now I've been here for two weeks and I'm beginning to enjoy myself. This business of self-rule is not so bad. It's much more fun doing things when we know we're deciding them ourselves. I've started going to school, since there was nothing else to do, and it was pretty miserable just sitting in the barracks. But it turns out that the lessons are fun and I really look forward to the next day. The teachers can make their subjects sound really exciting, but the most fun is in the evenings, when Anna or Egon talk about a book they've been reading or an opera they've seen. None of us has seen an opera yet, but when Egon tells the story and plays the gramophone record it feels almost as if we were sitting in the stalls. Egon is really nice and all the girls are in love with him except me. Of course he's charming, but he's dark and you know I only like fair boys with blue eyes. I love Anna, she's wonderful, you can talk to her about anything, she's like a real mother to us. We are taught in German and Hungarian and we're learning Swedish. I already understand a lot. We swot away at English and Hebrew too, it's only maths I don't like. We have child care too, where we get to learn how children arrive. Can you imagine, these girls here don't know anything about it!

But I must stop now, the evening meeting is in five minutes.

Kiss and hug from Sara.

[Double space]

I realized from Sara's letter that the school was very liberal. The teachers' aim seemed not to be to give the pupils as much education as possible, but to give them back a belief in life, confidence in their fellow-men. I was glad that Sara was happy, whereas my own everyday life had become routine and the early euphoria was beginning to disappear.

As the winter went on my mood changed. I found it more and more difficult to adapt to all this strangeness around me and the demands of this new life. At the same time, going to Australia moved further and further away. All the differences which had been so exciting to start with gradually became negative qualities. More and more often I felt that I couldn't manage any longer, that no one understood me, nobody liked me, everyone was exploiting me, it was impossible to live in this country. The idea that everything in Sweden was wonderful had turned into the opposite: everything was horrible.

But I saw no alternative, and the same thing happened that I had experienced before, and would experience again and again. When life becomes so difficult that you don't think you can live through one more day, you look around one evening, and discover that that day has also passed. Evening comes, morning comes, another day has passed and another, and another. Life goes on, whether one wants it to or not, it looks after itself. It rolls on like the waves of the sea. Only death can stop it. And death never comes when you yourself want it.

4 The Chocolate Factory

It was when everything was at its most difficult that Annmarie offered to let me share her flat. She had seen that I was unhappy with the Svenssons and realized that a change of work would help.

Once again she got out the paper to look through the advertisements, but this time under the heading Factory Work. The advertisement 'Small chocolate factory seeks chocolate dipper,' sounded attractive and a telephone conversation resulted in a promise that I could begin on the first of the month. Augusta Jansson's chocolate factory was a small family business on Styrmansgatan, directed by Signe and Helena, two charming sisters in their seventies. Augusta was dead now, and the business, consisting of the factory and two shops, was run by the younger sister, Signe Andree. The chairman was nephew Georg, but nothing happened without the approval of Helena, the elder sister. Helena's wonderful face had a thousand wrinkles and she had a soft, loving smile, ready to embrace all mankind. She was obviously less gifted than her sharp younger sister Signe, who understood the whole business. Signe was one of the few women in her generation who had been to university. She managed most things in the business, but on economic matters she always consulted young Georg, who had studied economics.

Both the management and the employees were very friendly. They did not speak German, and sign language felt unsatisfactory. In these surroundings I was forced to learn Swedish quickly. I began to read the paper, listen to the radio and ask Annmarie about all the strange words. I tried to guess the meaning of words from the context, or a resemblance to another language. These words, and those which occurred again and again, were easily remembered, but at the same time I fell into many misunderstandings: I thought that 'stan' (town) was a first name and that 'gärning' (deed) was a pistol.

My pay at the chocolate factory was 1.20 kr per hour, plus lunch. We were allowed to sample the chocolate and caramels, and since I was still starved of

sweet things, I made lavish use of this privilege. Little, round Mrs Nordkvist, who had taken me under her wing, taught me to 'dip chocolate': to heat chocolate to the right temperature, lift the centre on a fork, dip it in the chocolate and put it on a paper to dry. I gazed in fascination at the glossy, gleaming, golden-brown mass, and had to stop myself poking my finger into the big pot and licking it. But after the filling, dripping with chocolate, had been set out to dry I could no longer control myself and nervously stuffed an almond nougat in my mouth. Mrs Nordkvist gave me an encouraging look, but soon, when the sampling had gone much too far, she schooled herself to look discreetly away. In the rest periods I would dawdle, in order to taste all the varieties unnoticed. I could never have enough, and the sweet, slightly sickly smell (that everyone warned me against) never became unpleasant. ^{that} Working in a chocolate factory is supposed to put you off eating sweet things, ~~but that~~ never happened to me.

What fascinated me most was the way the candy, sugar pigs and silvery humbugs were made. Mr Eriksson ladled sugar into a big pan and I stared wide-eyed at the boiling mixture, while the bubbles increased and grew larger and larger. At regular intervals he dripped a little of the thickening mass into cold water and when the consistency was judged to be just right he heaped it all on the work table. After a time he began to knead, the powerful muscles of his upper arms moving in time with the work of his hands. When there were no lumps left and the sugar mixture was smooth and glistening, he hung the whole lot on a hook. He pulled at the tough, white mass, turned it, slapped it back on the hook and continued to pull and turn until the whole lump was soft and pliable. Then he divided it, poured red colouring on to one half and stuck the two halves together again. Then he hung everything up again on the hook, pulled and turned, pulled and turned, until the colours appeared in even stripes. Then he cut off quite large pieces from the mass and soon the plump, pink-and-white sugar pigs lay sleekly smiling on the work surface. Mr Eriksson in his white coat looked proudly at the result of his work, invited me to taste and asked expectantly:

'Well, is it good?'

Work at the factory began at eight and the walk to Styrmansgatan took only a few minutes. At lunchtime I took the few steps to the corner of Linnégatan, where both the shop and the apartment were. The table was already laid in the living-room and as soon as Georg and I arrived we sat down at the table: the two sisters, Georg, the business forewoman who was an old faithful from Augusta Jansson's time, and I.

'How do you like it in Sweden?' asked Signe.

'I like it very much. You are so kind to me, and Annmarie, my flatmate, is like a sister. It feels good to earn money and be free. Tonight I'm going to the opera.'

'You like music?'

'Yes, very much. I have bought a subscription, it was expensive but worth it. Where I was born there was no opera.'

'Where were you born?'

'In a little town in Transylvania.'

Everyone looked at me with interest, and Helena asked:

'Did you see Dracula?'

'Who is Dracula?'

'Don't you know? The one who used to get up at midnight and suck the blood out of everyone he met.'

'There's no such person.'

'Oh yes, he did exist. I read a book about him,' said the shop manageress. 'He lived somewhere in the forest.'

'In a castle in Transylvania,' Georg explained.

'I've never heard of him,' I said.

Only long afterwards did I realize whom they were talking about - the cruel medieval prince I had read about at school, Vlad Țepeș, infamous for impaling his enemies on spikes. It was he who had been the model for the character

in the novel called Dracula. Vlad Țepeș, who had been the personification of evil, killed only his enemies, whereas the personified evil I met in Germany murdered innocent people just because they happened to belong to a different ethnic group.

'Would you like to come to church with me on Sunday?' asked Mrs Nordkvist one day.

'I'm Jewish,' I replied.

'Ah well, then you will be going to the Catholic church.'

It was not the first time I had heard that in Sweden: Jews were thought to be Catholics. The Swedes did not know much about Jews. I wanted to make her understand, and began to tell her about Judaism, about how Christianity had developed from it, about church and synagogue, but it was some time before Mrs Nordkvist understood the difference between the two religions, Judaism and Catholicism. In any case, it ended with Mrs Nordkvist wanting to come with me one day and look at the synagogue.

From Annmarie I learned a great deal about Sweden and the Swedes. One dark winter's evening after work, when I had just crept into bed with a good book, the door opened and in came some girls with candles and glitter in their hair and served coffee and cakes. It was an unusual sight, but I had stopped being surprised. I accepted anything unusual like a child who has nothing to compare it with. Everything that happened was a matter of course. The girls sang an Italian serenade, we drank coffee and they went off again.

'Who were they?' I asked Annmarie. 'Why were they singing? Why did they have candles, why did they give us coffee, isn't it you who should have given them coffee?'

'Yes, as a rule, but today is St. Lucy's Day. The season is changing and the darkness is giving way to light. To celebrate the victory of light and its return to earth, it's customary for people to dress up as St. Lucy, the bearer of light, and visit their friends with coffee, cakes and biscuits.'

'Why are they all called Katti?'

'What do you mean?'

'I thought they were all saying Katti to each other.'

Annmarie laughed.

'They didn't say Katti, they said "Take a lussekatt". The saffron cakes they hand round are called lussekatt. They are a St. Lucy's Day speciality, only baked once a year.'

On Monday morning, on the way to the factory, I met Marton, whom I had not seen since he gave me those two potatoes in Bergen-Belsen. He looked at me a little uncertainly, raised his hat politely and asked:

'Aren't you Hanna Haller?'

'Yes - oh, hallo, I had trouble recognizing you, too. What are you doing here? When did you come to Sweden? Are you living in Stockholm too?'

I was glad to see him again and talked eagerly, wanting to know about everything at once. His eyes were shining with happiness as well, and as he hugged me he said, smiling calmly:

'How glad I am to see you! I want to know what has been happening since we last saw each other, too. How is Sara? You talk first.'

'Sara is well, she's at a school in Dalarna. I'm well too, I'm working in a chocolate factory round the corner here - but I think I must run, it's nearly eight o'clock,' I said after a hasty look at my watch. 'Couldn't we meet after work?'

'Of course. I'm working nearby too. What time do you stop work?'

'At four. And you?'

'Five,' he said.

'Then you can come up to my place, I'm living at Kommendörsgatan 7, third floor. The name on the door is Engström.'

'Right. Then I'll be there.'

I ran the last bit of the way, old memories rising up in my mind. Memories of Sziváros, awakened by the meeting. I had just reached the door when I heard Mrs Nordkvist, who was sitting down at the table ready to make sweets, asking:

'Isn't Hanna here yet?'

'Yes, I'm here,' I said breathlessly. 'I met someone from my town, I'm sorry I'm late.'

'It doesn't matter. Put on your apron now and come and help me dip chocolate.'

As I worked my thoughts continued to circle round Marton and our native town. Memories of Sziváros moved on into memories of the camp. These were pictures I was determined not to remember, so I dismissed them at once. Instead I began to think of the visit that evening, the first time in my life that someone would be coming to visit me. I did not give much thought to the fact that it would be a male visitor; for me Marton was an old acquaintance, a friend of my parents. I hoped that Annmarie would be at home and would help me to make coffee for him. I had managed to learn the Swedish method of drinking coffee. The custom of not offering biscuits without offering coffee was one of the country's oddities that I found strange, but I wanted to adapt at every level. When we had guests in Sziváros we offered cake. If the sweetness made one thirsty, one was given water, drinking coffee only in the morning. I could not afford to buy biscuits, but I could offer chocolate. I would buy a few pralines, we usually got the second lot cheap, and since it was still the beginning of the week I had a little of my week's wages left.

The day went on as usual. After lunch I helped with the caramel cooking and at four o'clock I was in a hurry to take off my apron and go home.

I was in luck, Annmarie was there already. I was scarcely through the door when I shouted:

'Hey, an old acquaintance from Sziváros is coming soon. I hope you won't be cross with me for inviting him here. He's a very nice man, I bumped into him this morning on the way to work. I was very surprised, I didn't know he was in Sweden.'

'Who is he? Tell me. Is he attractive?'

'He's not a young man, he's middle-aged. He's old, he used to be a friend of my parents. I met him at Bergen-Belsen when I was looking for my father. Imagine, there, when everyone was only thinking of themselves, he gave me two potatoes!'

'Shall we give him coffee?'

'Yes, I think so. I've bought a few sweets for us to eat as well.'

Annmarie made the coffee and I got out the cups. It was not long before the door bell rang. I opened the door and after we had hugged each other I introduced Marton to Annmarie. They shook hands and we sat down. Annmarie, realizing that we would really prefer to speak Hungarian, excused herself, pleaded work and sat down with a book in the furthest corner of the room. I talked eagerly about everything I thought he would like to hear. Everything that had happened to us since we came to Sweden, all the dear ones we missed, the town where we were born, to which none of us wanted to return. Then he began and I listened attentively to his account of what had happened to him.

He must have been ill even when we met at Bergen-Belsen. He told me that the next day he had been taken to the military hospital with dysentery. Two months later, when he thought he was well enough, he went with the Swedish Red Cross buses to Sweden. He was put in quarantine at the museum in Malmö, but soon afterwards they discovered that he had water on the lungs and he was sent to a sanatorium at Lärbro in Gotland. Gradually his health improved and in September he was discharged fit. After that he had travelled to Stockholm, where he had found work at a Jewish institution. He gave poignant accounts of what had happened to him and his companions, and I felt his pain when I heard the story of Jakov. Jakov was one of his oldest friends whom he had managed to stay with throughout the period in the camps. They had gone through hell together in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and when they were both hoping for a new life Jakov also fell ill and came to Lärbro. There his tuberculosis had

grown worse, his condition graver and graver, until one day he stopped breathing. Burial was a big problem, as there was no Jewish cemetery in Lärbro. Nor was there money to transport the body to Stockholm, so he had been buried in the local Christian churchyard. Marton's grief at his friend's death was compounded by his sorrow at being unable to provide him with his last rest in a Jewish cemetery. What was also apparent through the account was his fear of death, aggravated by the knowledge that he himself could not be certain of resting in a Jewish grave.

While Marton spoke I realized that Annmarie had let the book lie on her knee and was watching him attentively. When he referred to Lärbro she joined in the conversation and Marton had to repeat in German what he had just told me. Annmarie asked him about Jewish customs and wanted explanations of the different religious laws, and the conversation moved from the personal to a discussion on general questions, religious philosophy, moral and ethical issues. Annmarie brought in coffee and all three of us talked until late that evening.

When Marton had gone we put away the coffee cups and talked about our evening guest.

'What a lovely evening we've had. I haven't had such a lovely evening since I lost my friends in Sziváros. What a lot he has read, what a lot he knows.'

'Why did you say he was old? He's not old at all, he's delightful. How good-looking he is, he's really intense,' said Annmarie.

Intense? I thought. Actually, she was right. His beautiful grey eyes were very intense. He was dark and slender, with aristocratic looks, and wore his simple grey suit with great elegance. Suddenly it struck me that Marton was not just an old friend of my parents, he was also a very attractive man. Older than me, of course, but I had always been attracted to older boys. I had always needed someone to look up to, someone superior to me. Boys of my own age behaved much too childishly in my eyes. Nor was there any doubt in my mind that Marton was superior to me, and yet we seemed to have so many subjects of

conversation in common, so many common interests. Now I hoped we would meet again and continue our discussions. He had not left his address and I had not asked if we could meet again, but now I began to hope that he would get in touch with me.

*

After a month in Stockholm I began to feel at home. I was surrounded by friendly people, all of whom wished me well. I was beginning to find friends who treated me as an equal.

Life was worth living again. By day, that is. At night I was back in hell.

The burning house. The flames. I must get out, I want to run but I can't, my feet will not obey me. The fire is closing in from all directions, I try to jump through the window, but a grinning German stands in my way. I shout for help, but not a sound comes from my throat. I strain with all my strength, but the German only laughs: 'Did you think you would be the one to get away? You're going to burn just like your mother!' The smoke chokes me, I wake up with a racing heart, soaked with sweat.

The burning house has gone, but the words 'just like your mother' are still echoing inside me. Mother, it was my fault that you were sent to the gas chamber. It was my fault, I should have comforted you, so that you did not stand tearfully in front of Mengele, I should have taken off your black shawl, you would have looked younger then. I deceived you when I said I did not care that we were going to die - we didn't die, only you did. I let you go to your death while I went on living. Why was I the one who survived? What was the purpose of that?

I enjoyed my work, with my companions there and the nice ladies. The chocolate and the regular food almost resulted in my passing out when, after six months, I stood on some scales. Eighty-three kilos! I could not believe my eyes, and slowly I began to realize it was time to stop working at the factory.

[Double space]

I rang up Edit, who was married now and working at Gustafsberg's china factories. She told me ecstatically that she was pregnant, her dearest wish was going to be fulfilled. She had longed so passionately for a child that now she scarcely dared to believe it. Her marriage, on the other hand, was not as good as I had hoped. Tomas and she were very different and although both of them had tried to do their best, they had far too many differences of opinion. Tomas liked to have a beer with his friends, while Edit preferred to go to the opera. Tomas liked inviting people home on Sundays, Edit wanted to walk in the woods with Tomas. She had married in hope of an attentive cavalier, while what he needed was a housekeeper. She had begun to regret their hasty marriage, but continued to hope that everything would change after the baby arrived.

'I've begun to knit a little yellow romper suit, although I hope it will be a little girl. She will be called Rebecca after my mother, whom I never knew. Just imagine having a baby to look after, giving it all the love I missed! And in spite of everything Tomas is nice. He doesn't want me to work after the baby comes. Then things will be better between us too.'

'Do you quarrel?'

'Sometimes. He doesn't understand that I don't like his friends. Once he came home drunk and I had a problem with that. Although he promised never to do it again and I really hope he will keep his promise.'

'What's it like at the factory?'

'It's nice there. I have a good job and good companions. How are things with you?'

'I've been getting on well, but I'm thinking of stopping now. I was thinking of trying to start work in an office.'

'Can you type and do shorthand?'

'Not yet, but soon. I started on an evening course a few months ago and it's still going pretty slowly, but I'm going to try, all the same. I've been thinking of giving in my notice at the end of the month.'

'Do you dare to?'

'I have to dare.'

'Good luck!'

'Thanks, I need it.'

5 American Express

When I came home that day I was met by a very agitated Annmarie. I had no chance to tell her that I had given in my notice before she started:

'Hanna, you can't go on living here. I'll help you find a room somewhere else, but you've got to go. You've been living with me for six months now, it shouldn't be so difficult for you to begin to make your own way.'

A whole world collapsed inside me. The fixed point of my existence, the only person who had cared about me, my new-found friend Annmarie, no longer wanted to have me living with her.

'What's happened? Have I done something wrong? Don't you like me any more?'

'You haven't done anything, and I like you as much as before, but you can't go on living here.'

'But why?'

'The neighbours have begun to tittle-tattle, they accuse us of being lesbians, and I don't want any of that.'

'Lesbians? What's that?'

'They think we have a relationship with each other. Horrible old women, they can't or won't understand that I just want to help you. That after having such a hard time, you need someone to help you come back to life, and start to find a new future. They are only happy when they have something to gossip about. But don't worry, we'll find you a cheap room, and you can come here as often as you like. We'll go on being friends even if you are living somewhere else.'

Suddenly all my security had vanished into thin air. There I stood, with no home and no work. What would become of me? But I said nothing. I dared not tell her that I had just given in my notice, she was still upset after talking to those women.

The days that followed felt leaden. I did not want to talk to my workmates about my problem. They thought I had a job in an office and that was why

I had given in my notice, and they looked at me with admiration. Not wanting to disappoint them, I did not tell them the truth. Keeping my face calm, I promised to come and see them often and tell them about my new job.

Problems breed new problems. When everything was already in a complete mess, Sara had to add to the load. Having enjoyed herself so much at Smedsbo, she was now tired of school life, and when I visited her at the weekend she said:

'I don't want to stay here any more, I'm grown up, I'm sixteen now.'

'Don't be silly, what do you think you'll do?'

'Work, of course.'

'It must be more fun going to school.'

'No, I've had enough, I want to live too. I want to live in Stockholm, I want to be with you, I want to work. Can't you arrange things so that we can live together? As you've got to move anyway?'

'Are you sure this is what you want?'

'Absolutely sure.'

'It's difficult to find a good job, you saw what it was like for me. What are you going to do, be a maid?'

'No, but I'm sure I can get a job at a factory too.'

'It will be hard work.'

'Don't you think I might get your job at the chocolate factory when you finish? Couldn't you ask them?'

'Okay, I'll talk to Annmarie and Miss Andree. But in any case, you must finish the term first before you think of coming to Stockholm at all.'

Happy with my answer, Sara hugged me. Although I also liked the idea of having her near me, I had some misgivings. I was worried about what might happen, but I hoped her happiness would not be clouded.

Annmarie had soon succeeded in finding a furnished room for us, and two weeks later I moved out of her flat. I had no work, I missed Annmarie, and life was no longer worth living. The only bright spot, that Sara would be moving in too,

lay several months ahead. Not even the thought of that evening's concert could release me from my sense of doom. Normally music always turned my mind to happier thoughts and while I was working at the factory I had saved up to buy a concert subscription. But now even music held out no hope of happiness and I went to the concert only in order not to waste the ticket.

I walked towards Mille's sculpture group in front of the concert hall and when I looked up at the figures playing their harps round Orpheus I seemed to see contemptuous smiles on their lips. 'Here you are, pretending to go to a concert as if you had not a care in the world, as if you were a perfectly ordinary Swedish citizen out to enjoy yourself after the day's work...' I stood still, feeling that I would have liked to follow Orpheus to the underworld, change places with Eurydice, and stay there for good.

On I went, among the people streaming towards the blue building, up the steps, in through the door, and to the cloakroom, where I took off my coat. After a quick glance at the programme on the wall I went on up the stairs to my seat, high up in the upper circle. Once there, I looked enviously at all those murmuring, well-dressed and apparently carefree men and women, while the orchestra tuned their instruments.

When the conductor raised his baton I was still depressed, but the energy of Hindemith's primitive power took hold of me and held me fast. The almost atonal cascades of notes released the suppressed tension, and suddenly all the darkness vanished. I let the music pour over me, and breathed more easily. That's it, thundered Hindemith, you're not the only one to know loneliness and rejection, there is no consolation, there is only music.

After the interval Nathan Milstein played Bruch's first violin concerto in G flat, and now the earlier dark thoughts had gone I was able to enjoy its cadences to the full.

Stockholm's favourite soloist did not disappoint his public that night, either. When the last stroke of the bow had sounded, the applause began and the public

had its reward: several generous encores. The applause continued, as if it would never stop. In a burst of high spirits, I clapped till my hands were red, and did not stop until the last musician had left the stage. What had Dostoevsky said? 'It's only by loving life with all its paradoxes that the human being can grasp its innermost meaning - in so far as it needs to be grasped at all.'

The hall was beginning to empty as I got up and as I walked towards the stairs I had an inspiration.

I went over to a young man who looked like an American, and asked in English:

'Will you marry me?'

He stopped short as if struck by lightning, looked me up and down, and began to stammer:

'What, what do you mean? Who are you?'

Yes, who am I? I came to Sweden as a guest, but now I am no longer a guest. I am called a foreigner. A foreigner, with a residence permit which must be renewed every three months and an application to go to Australia as an immigrant.

'I'm a foreigner. I have been in German concentration camps and I want to leave Europe. America, Australia, anywhere at all, but I don't want to stay here. I am waiting for an Australian immigration permit, but it seems that will never come. If you would marry me I could leave here, then we could divorce.'

He listened attentively. All the same, he must have realized already from my appearance what my background was: the refugee girls all looked alike, differing from the Swedish girls because of their short, old-fashioned skirts, short hair and exaggerated gestures.

'I understand,' he said after a brief pause, 'but it's not that simple for me to get married. It would be difficult to explain to my fiancée - among other things. I feel for you, but unfortunately I can't help. I hope this state of affairs won't go on much longer and that you'll soon be able to get to Australia,' he added, turning away and walking on towards the exit.

So that was no good, either. Had I really thought it would work?

The next morning I woke up feeling feverish in my new rented room. My body felt painful all over and I turned to the wall and hoped to die. I wanted to escape from everything and everyone. What was the point of living, when all the people I loved most were dead, when Annmarie, my only friend, had also deserted me, when I would never be able to work at anything meaningful? I began to realize that I would never be going to Australia and in Sweden I had no hope of training for anything. I could do nothing, I spoke hardly any Swedish, who would want to give me a job?

While I lay in the darkness waiting for death, the telephone rang. It was from the American Express, the travel agent in Norrmalmstorg. Was I the one who had replied to their advertisement for a secretary? If so, I was welcome to come and see the director. They urgently needed an English-speaking secretary with shorthand and typing.

I sat up in bed and suddenly, through the blind, I saw the spring sun peeping out. I no longer wanted to die, I was going to be secretary to the director of a travel bureau. I could speak English, I could type a little, after all I had used my father's typewriter every time I had visited him at the office. And even if I could not take shorthand yet, I had already started on an evening course...

I dressed quickly and walked along Strandvägen to Norrmalmstorg. The director received me very kindly and questioned me in English.

'How long have you been in Sweden?'

'A year.'

'Can you speak Swedish?'

'A little.'

'What have you done since you came to Sweden?'

'I worked with a family for one month and for six months I was in a chocolate factory.'

'Where did you learn your English?'

'I learned it in my teens. I took private lessons when I was going to high school and later I worked as an interpreter in Bergen-Belsen.'

'What is your educational background?'

High School ~~High School Graduate~~ Student, and one year's training as a primary school teacher.'

'What languages do you know?'

'German, English, French, Italian, as well as Hungarian and Romanian.'

'Can you do shorthand and typing?'

'I'm going to evening classes, I can't do shorthand yet, but I can take dictation, I write fast. I can type a little, I used to do it at my father's office.'

'I need a director's secretary who can write letters from dictation. Can you manage that?'

'I think so.'

'What pay do you want?'

'I don't know. I'll take what I'm given.'

'When can you start?'

'Any time.'

'You can have 250 kronor per month. Office hours are nine till five, with an hour for lunch. Nine to one on Saturdays. Can you start on Monday?'

'Yes, thank you.'

As if by a miracle I was well. As if I had never been ill I almost flew home again and could scarcely wait till Monday. I telephoned Annmarie.

'I've got a job at a travel agent's.'

'Congrats,' she said. 'What are you going to do?'

'I'm going to be the director's secretary.'

'But you can't do anything, how did you dare to take a job like that?'

'I told the director I was learning to take shorthand.'

'But what about the typing?'

'He knows I'm not too good. I told him I could only do a little, but I used to use the typewriter when I visited my father at the factory.'

'I wish you luck. But you certainly are brave.'

I didn't feel brave. On the contrary, I was worried about what would happen, but my conscience was clear. I honestly believed I had told the director the truth.

I had set the alarm clock on Sunday evening but I woke up long before it was time to get up. I fetched water, washed and put on my best dress, the black and yellow checked one, and sat down to wait for half past eight.

I lived in a rented room with a family who were not particularly pleased that I liked to shower in the morning. Very soon I had to promise that the bathroom would only be used on two evenings a week. In the morning I was to wash in the hand-basin with water from the kitchenette. I also had permission to make tea, but as the kitchenette was very small and the sink was always full of unwashed dishes, I generally preferred simply to drink water. Now I was going to earn a little more I intended to buy myself an electric immersion heater so that I could have hot tea in the morning. I was also going to buy myself a teacup, so that I did not have to wash up their dirty cups.

With these thoughts in my head I left my room. I did not think it was worth taking the streetcar, it would not take me many minutes to walk to Norrmalmstorg.

Now I was an office-worker, on the way to my first day at work. I felt a sense of solidarity with all the people hurrying to their jobs, and looked for the happiness I was feeling in their faces, too. I smiled at everyone I met and was very disappointed when no one responded. It must be because the weather has got worse. People don't feel like smiling when the wind's blowing, I thought and went on day-dreaming about all the things I would buy and all the things I would do, now that I had a job.

At the travel bureau a girl welcomed me, showed me round and introduced the rest of the staff. The office consisted of four rooms and was elegant without being

showy. I was shown my room, which was outside the director's. The room was not very big, but it felt warm and welcoming. A birch-wood desk, a comfortable office chair and a bookshelf with files in it made up the office furniture, and artistic photographs of American landscapes decorated the walls. I had not had time to look at them all when I heard the director's voice calling me. He immediately began to dictate a letter in English and patiently repeated the words I had not caught. Nor did he lose patience when I asked him to spell out unfamiliar words. When he had finished dictating I sat down at the typewriter, turned the knob to put the paper in straight with a great effort, and began to type. I broke off at regular intervals to go in to the director's room and ask all over again about a word I had difficulty in making out, or another that I could not spell. My index fingers groped their way across the keys, and every letter took a great deal of time. I did not notice how the hours were passing, and when the director was on his way to lunch I was still sitting at the typewriter. He stood behind my chair and read what I had managed up to then. The letter was still a long way off its closing compliments.

I felt his eyes on the back of my neck and sat tensely: let him ^{say}~~think~~ it's all right!

'You certainly did say that you could only type a little, but I had not realized that you couldn't type at all. You need not go on,' he added, and left the room.

I stopped breathing, time had stopped. I need not go on. Was it that bad? What was wrong with it? What would happen now? Would I have to leave? Would I have to go back to the factory?

I sat there, not knowing what to do. I didn't have to finish the letter, though I thought it was going really well. It was the lunch break, but I did not feel like going out to eat. The uncertainty over my future lay like a lump in my stomach.

When the director came back he told me that I was dismissed. This was an office, letters had to be typed up quickly, they did not have time to wait for me to learn to type. As a favour I could wait out the month, but I need not do anything. Unneeded, a failure, I sat in a corner and watched all the others working.

Someone asked me to sweep the floor and I was glad to have something to do, although I was ashamed in front of the clients. My dreams of becoming a director's secretary had turned into the reality of an errand girl.

After a few days the accountant asked me if I could calculate and handed over some invoices to test me. My calculations persuaded him that I could work on the accounts, and after a talk with the director I was entrusted with the task of helping with the book-keeping. This promotion relieved my gloom and helped me to regain my self-confidence. I could look myself in the face again.

Now I was seriously going to work on my decision to slim. I was fat, and I was short of money. I missed breakfast, bought an apple and a cigarette for lunch, and a packet of 25-öre Marie biscuits for supper. In this way I both saved money and at the same time thought I could lose weight. I did not know much about either slimming or nutrition, I only knew that I weighed too much. I was quite determined to stick to this diet, although I was hungry all the time. Now and then, when the hunger was too much for me, I went to the Horseshoe Bar in Hamngatan. There I really went to town and ordered a Lyonnaise sausage at 1.50, the height of culinary luxury.

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On the way to Kungsträdgården I bumped into Marton. It was the lunch break, hunger was tearing at my guts, and I was about to sit down with my daily apple.

'Hi, it's been a long time,' I said. 'You never got in touch. How are you? Are you still working at Östermalm?'

'Hi, good to see you. Yes, I'm still working, are you?'

'No, I got a job at a travel agent's in Norrmalmstorg, but I got the sack on the same day. Now I don't know what's going to happen to me.'

'How was that? Tell.'

'Come on, let's sit on a bench and talk.'

'Aren't you hungry?'

'I am, but I must keep on slimming, so it suits me to miss lunch.'

'Don't be stupid. You don't need to slim. Haven't you starved enough?'

'Yes, but I don't want to be fat. Can't you see how big I've got since those months at the chocolate factory?'

'You've grown strong, but you're not fat. Don't be stupid now, come on, we'll go and eat. I'm on my way to the Maria domestic science school, they have very good food and you can eat as much as you like for 2.50.'

Hunger and the will to lose weight soon fought out the very unequal struggle.

'Okay, let's go there,' I said, hanging on to his insistence that I was not fat.

We turned into Norrmalmstorg and went up the steps to the restaurant. The smörgåsbord was enticing, with cheese, herring and potato, different sorts of sausage and liver paste, hot dishes and puddings, and it was not until the sharp edge of my hunger had ~~been~~ worn off that I could talk about what had happened since we met. Marton's response was to assure me that I had done well to give in my notice, to praise my efforts to get further in my professional life, and to wish me luck for the future. I also told him of my dream of training as a doctor and he promised to look into the possibility of a bursary. Then he told me in turn that he had moved to the suburbs, to a nice room in Bromma. The lunch hour flew by unnoticed, and when we parted we exchanged telephone numbers and agreed to meet again.

On my way back to the office I thought contentedly about the unexpected meeting. Now I no longer saw Marton as a friend of my parents, but as a likeable man whom I was pleased to see again.

When the month was over the director of the travel bureau must have thought that I had worked out my wages after all. He called me in and asked what I thought of doing in the future. I said I thought of looking for another job, but I did not yet know where or how. I so much wanted to work in an office, but I had realized that I must be able to type better first. He was keen to help me, and offered to write me a letter of recommendation to a friend of his, Rolf Lansing.

'Rolf Lansing arrived here recently from Germany. He has started a new agency and needs someone to look after the general office work.'

'A letter really would be a great help,' I said.

He got out his fountain pen and after a few minutes the letter was ready.

'I have told him that you are going to secretarial school and that you are hard-working,' he said, putting the letter in an envelope. 'Good luck.'

I had the impression that the director believed in me, and he was not going to regret it.

I said goodbye to the staff and set off for the address on the envelope, Regeringsgatan 37. The office was five floors up and as the lift had stopped at four I ran up another spiral staircase and rang at the door. A middle-aged man in a simple grey suit opened it. I found myself in a small office with two desks and some files on an otherwise almost empty bookshelf. I gave him the letter, very much prepared to sit on the fence as regards Mr Lansing, who spoke with a German accent. I was suspicious of all Germans, especially those who were a little older than I was. He was friendly, and when he had heard about my background he was quick to assure me of his repudiation of Nazism. He said he had been against it from the start and had only served at the front during the war as a soldier in the Wehrmacht. After the war he had married a Swedish woman and they were now expecting their first child. Up to then he had been on his own in the new agency, but now he needed help, someone he could rely on, who could grow with the job. The pay was not much, but he promised better conditions as my proficiency increased.

To have someone trusting you - that gives you incredible strength, it makes you grow. You don't want to disappoint the person who trusts you, and I redoubled my efforts at evening classes. I made rapid progress and soon I could take shorthand and type simple letters in Swedish too. Mr Lansing was pleased, I got a pay rise, and my self-confidence slowly returned.

A week after the lunch with Marton he rang up to tell me that he had investigated the possibility of getting a bursary for further education. Only small sums were available and I would not be able to study without earning money at the same time. We talked for a long time and in the end he asked if I would like to meet him. I was very willing and we decided that he would pick me up next Sunday at eleven o'clock. I put down the receiver and registered with pleasure that I now had a date. A man was showing an interest in me, he wanted to see me, that had the charm of novelty.

After work I went home and looked through my wardrobe, wondering what I could wear on Sunday. I had few clothes and I so much wanted to make a good impression. I decided to put on the black dress I had bought with my first wages from the Svensson family, and the black pumps, which were still smart, but I had no suitable overcoat. I rang up Annmarie and told her about my worries, asking if I could borrow her black suit jacket for the occasion. She was as kind as ever, and promised to come over with it the next day. When Sunday came I dressed carefully and waited impatiently for Marton. On the stroke of eleven he rang the bell and I went down to open the door.

'How smart you are,' he said, giving me an appreciative look. 'Shall we go for a walk?'

'Of course, I'll just put on my jacket,' I replied.

We walked towards the zoo and I told him about the letter of recommendation from the nice travel bureau director, about my new work and Mr Lansing and my successes and problems at evening classes. We discussed my dream of continuing my studies and he told me about his thoughts and problems. He was a lawyer,

but his degree was not valid in Sweden. In order to be able to practise he would have to sit at a school desk again and take the Swedish exam. This did not seem to be feasible at present, as his current position was so demanding that it left no room for study. He told me about his work, which he enjoyed, about pleasant workmates and difficult bosses, about his little room in Bromma and how he missed the family and the friends who had disappeared. We talked about people we had both known, about books we had read, and realized with surprise that the morning had gone without our noticing.

'It's two o'clock, aren't you hungry?'

'No, but perhaps you are. We're not far from where I live, come on in. I think I've a little bit of bread at home and we can drink tea. It's in a bit of a mess but I hope you'll excuse that.'

Tired from our walk, we stopped outside my door in Skeppargatan. We went into the untidy room and I put on the kettle for tea. With the French loaf I had bought the day before I prepared a spartan meal with mock caviar, Kavli's rocket cheese, and Findus strawberry jam, and then went out to the kitchen to boil some eggs. We ate and went on talking as time flew by. We seemed never to run out of subjects for conversation and many cups of tea had been drunk before Marton looked at his watch and realized that it was late in the afternoon. He pleaded a number of things he had to do before evening, got up, thanked me and left.

6 In Love

I had also met a number of delightful young Swedish people, girls and boys with whom I got on well. I missed my old friends and this belonging to a new crowd gave me an enhanced identity. Now, after three years in Sweden, I had begun to feel the equal of the other office girls I met. I was no longer an outsider, my life was no longer so different from theirs. I also began to understand the nuances of life, everything was no longer black or white; neither as wonderful as it seemed during the early days, nor as unbearable as it turned out to be later. I had settled down, gained a more critical outlook, and realized that life in Sweden also had its advantages and disadvantages. It was not simply a paradise, as I had thought on my arrival, nor the hell it had seemed when obstacles loomed large. I could now observe events more objectively, I could take part in the conversation in lunch breaks, talk about books I had read, pleasant entertainments I had been to and an eventful holiday I had also enjoyed. I too could now look forward to Saturday dances and Sunday excursions.

At one of these dances Sara met the attractive, velvet-eyed Anders, who was obviously interested in her. He had no difficulty in winning her sixteen year-old heart and soon they were inseparable. Sara, the unremarkable teenager, had turned into a radiantly beautiful young lady with long blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes, and now she was in love. I was pleased, although I did not really believe that their love was genuine. But it meant that I did not have to feel too selfish, when I was pursuing my own pleasures. One day, when they came back from one of their meetings, Anders asked to speak to me.

'I love your sister, I want to marry her. Have you anything against it?'

Of course you can love her, I thought. No one can have enough love. But marriage?

'Don't you think she's too young?'

'Perhaps she is, but she needs to forget everything that has happened as soon as possible, and I think I can help her with that. I believe she loves me too, and what better way is there of forgetting than love?'

'That's true. But do you really think that a sixteen year-old's love can be strong enough to last throughout a marriage?'

'My love is strong enough for us both. I hope I can also help hers to grow and develop.'

'Have you asked her if she wants to marry you?'

'Yes, she does.'

'I will talk to her.'

This was not easy. To dissuade a sixteen year-old in love, who has recently lost both mother and father - how could I dare? Although I doubted that they would really suit each other: he was Swedish, with a completely different background and completely different values from Sara. I talked to Sara, we argued to and fro, and it always ended with: 'I want to marry Anders'.

'How do you know that your first love will last a lifetime?'

'It's not really my first love. You remember I was in love with Bob, the English soldier in Bergen-Belsen, and this is much more serious.'

'What happens if you meet someone else you fall in love with?'

'Impossible. There couldn't be anyone else as attractive as he is.'

'Do you want to marry him just because he's so attractive?'

'No, not just that. He's nice, too, bright and intelligent. He loves me and I want to have a family.'

I was at a loss. I too had a great desire for a family. Had I not come close to marrying the very first person who wanted me, and it was she, this child, who had not let it happen. 'If you don't love him, you shouldn't marry,' she had said. And now, when she comes to me and tells me she's in love and the man wants to marry her, have I the right to say no? Anders had a good job, they would be able to live in his one-room flat for the time being - why did I feel

One Saturday afternoon a few weeks later he rang up and asked me out to his flat. He would give me tea and we would go for a walk in the woods close to the suburb where he lived. I was a little doubtful as to whether I should accept his invitation or go into town with Sara. On Saturday evenings we usually took a walk along Kungsgatan and ate cakes at Ogo. This was the meeting place for us 'refugees', where we met our contemporaries, where all the romances began. I had tried to persuade Marton to come, but he did not want to, he did not enjoy large parties. After thinking it over for some time I decided that I would meet him and accepted his invitation.

As we walked in the woods we came closer and closer to each other, the atmosphere from the church returned, and when he suddenly kissed me I felt everything change. As if at a lightning stroke it was clear to me that I was in love. That was why I rejected my friends' amusements, that was why I preferred his company. I searched his face - did he love me too? Otherwise why would he kiss me? I was still that Victorian, well brought-up girl from Sziváros, who could not imagine a kiss without love. Now I suddenly saw his beautiful, ardent eyes, his warm, gentle smile, felt his charm and my need for nearness. He's the one I want to marry, the thought flashed through my mind, he's the one I want to have a family with, it's his children I want to bear. I hope he feels the same. I nestled against him, took his arm, and without a word we went on to the house where he lived.

A few hours later we parted and I flew home on butterfly's wings. My heart was singing, nothing was difficult now, nothing was dark, from now on life would consist only of happiness. I could throw away my crutches, they were no longer needed, he had given me strength. I saw his face in everyone I met, and heard his voice in all the sounds of the night. I went to sleep with a big smile and woke up again with an even bigger one. I woke up Sara and could not stop talking about my great love. The whole day passed as if in ecstasy, and every time the telephone rang I hoped it was him. On Monday, as soon as I came home

from the office, I sat by the telephone, waiting for him to call. He did not call. Not that evening, nor the next. On Wednesday evening I could no longer control myself and rang him up.

'Hallo, I just wanted to say that it was so lovely on Saturday.'

'I think so too,' he said.

'Can we meet on Saturday?'

'No, what happened was wrong. We mustn't meet. You must spend your time with your contemporaries, I'm too old for you.'

'But it was what you wanted?'

'It was a moment of weakness, I gave way to something I should have kept under control.'

So he doesn't love me. It was just a momentary aberration. I would never see him again.

So I thought. Next morning that was forgotten. I only felt more and more that I loved him, regardless of how he behaved. Nothing was fun any more, the walk down Kungsgatan was quite pointless. I must meet him again, I must explain to him that it was not true that our meeting had simply been a surge of erotic emotion. We were made for each other. It was so seldom that one found the right love, and now, when I was convinced that I had done so, I had no intention of giving up. Only two people really belong together, only if those two find each other can they be truly happy. We two had found each other, and Marton had to understand that too.

'You are so young,' said Marton, when we met again and I blushingly confessed my love. 'You may mean it now, but in a few years you will realize that I am too old for you. You will still be young when you're forty, but by then I shall be an old man of sixty. You won't want me.'

What young person wants to think about the future? For me there was only now, not the past, not what was to come, it was only today that counted, and today I was in love.

'How can you say something like that? I'm sure of my feelings. I shall always want you. But perhaps you don't feel the same.'

Sara said the same thing. Again and again she raised the question of marriage and I found it more and more difficult to answer evasively.

'After all, you say the only man you can imagine marrying is Marton. So you ought to understand how I feel,' she said one evening, when we were once again discussing her relationship with Anders.

'But I'm older.'

'Even if I'm younger, I listen to my heart as well, and my heart also says he's the right one, he's the one I must marry.'

'All the same, I don't think you should be in too much of a hurry. What if Anders gets tired of you and finds someone else? How would it feel to be cheated? He's just the type.'

'You don't want me to get married, just because Marton doesn't want to marry you. Does that mean I have to go without as well?

'I don't think that at all. I'm only thinking of what's best for you. And if you're absolutely convinced now that he's the one you want, then get married. But you must at least wait, so that both of you are really certain that it's what you want.'

'How long?'

'A year?'

'It will be hard, but we'll do it.'

The next Saturday evening, when my friends were going out dancing, I did not want to go with them. I got on a streetcar and went out to Bromma, where Marton lived. Although I doubted if he cared about me, I still wanted to see him. I had not been invited, he didn't even know that I was on my way. Would he let me in?

I studied the houses the streetcar was passing and imagined life behind those curtains. Families together at the table, or listening to the radio, young

people dressing up to go out and meet their sweethearts. I saw in my mind small children in their beds and parents kissing them goodnight, teenagers at the piano or playing with their dogs, grandmothers with their crochet and grandfathers with their pipes. Only I was homeless. Only I had no one who cared about me.

After Tranebergsbron the track ran close to the houses and the lighted windows flickered by. The blinds were generally down, so I could not confirm my fantasies, but I believed firmly in the idyll and felt sorry for myself. Even my friends had company, they were out with boys, I was the only one who was alone. And unhappily in love. Within me I heard Marton's voice:

'You're in love with love. You think you love me but what you love is only an illusion, a picture you yourself have painted. An ideal picture, filled with your dreams, which have very little to do with the real me. All the love you have inside you is looking for a way out, you want to share it with someone, and I happened to be passing.'

'It's not true. It's you, you, Marton Prager, that I love. Only your strength can give me courage, only your happiness can make me happy. It's only with you that I can talk about everything I feel and hope for. Only you can understand my innermost thoughts.'

'I like you very much, I may even love you. But I must not tie you down, that would be selfish. I am so much older, and I am the one who has to keep a cool head. When I am seventy you will still be only fifty. It can never succeed.'

'I don't feel as if there were any age difference between us. We have the same interests, the same pleasures, the fact that you're older is good. I have never got on with boys of my own age, they're too childish.'

He did not answer. The argument had come to a stop again, we got no further. He had difficulty in convincing me that we did not belong together, and I could not get him to accept the opposite.

He did not touch me. For me, longing for his kisses, it was difficult to stop myself falling on his neck. But he had spoken soberly, and I did not dare to. I drank the tea he had given me, thanked him and went back to the streetcar with the firm conviction that I would never meet him again.

Next morning I woke up from a curious dream. I was lying in a sunny meadow, which was full of snakes. The snakes crawled over me, they crawled round on my chest, and I, who have always been frightened of snakes, felt warm and happy at the creatures' touch. I sat up in bed and suddenly understood that it did not matter how much Marton tortured me with his coldness, I would always love him. Even the pain he caused me was transformed into pleasure.

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I had returned to my old custom of writing a diary. As I wrote, and the questions appeared on paper, I was able to discover many things that were linked together. From then on I saw our relationship more and more clearly. I began to understand that the roots of my inexpressible love were a longing for my lost father, for my lost family. But that only strengthened my resolve.

Marton was an old acquaintance from Sziváros and I had met him while I was looking for my father in Germany. Later on we happened to meet again in Sweden. What had begun as no more than a meeting between two fellow Romanians, had slowly developed into passionate love - at least on my side. We had the same background we spoke the same language, he understood me as no one else could. The loss of the old crowd in Sziváros was deeply felt. I longed for my friends, my equals, and the endless debates which stimulated the teenager's desire for knowledge. My friends had gone, and now, when at last I had met an equal, I had no intention of letting him go just because he was older. I needed him, more than my daily bread. He was the only person I wanted to see, the only man with whom I could imagine having a family. If he did not want me as his wife, I would be his lover. He could decide, make his own terms, as long as I could be near him.

At the same time, my pride had also manifested itself - perhaps he did not want me at all? In that case I would stop seeing him, however difficult it might be. I did not want to be the one who clung on to someone, not even him.

The streetcar stopped at Brommaplan. After a short walk I came to Stopvägen 22, where he lived. My heart was pounding as I walked up the two flights of stairs to the door with the owner's name engraved on a fine copper plate. As I pressed the bell I thought longingly of all that the nameplate symbolized. If I ever had a home of my own I would get a nameplate like that, even if it was expensive.

I had to ring twice before the well-known voice came from behind the door.

'Who is it?'

'Hanna. Can I come in?'

What would he say? No, I'm busy. No, I've got visitors. No, I don't want to see you. For a few seconds I regretted my boldness and promised never to expose myself to anything like this again. The door opened, and I almost fainted when I heard him say: 'Come in'.

The room he lived in was a little rented room with only the barest necessities in it. A bed, a table, two armchairs. To make space for the few books he had already managed to get himself, he had made a bookshelf of planks and bricks. There were some reproductions on the walls and spring flowers in a vase. The standard lamp shed a cone of light on one armchair, the rest of the room was in semi-darkness. On the table lay the open book he had presumably put down to open the door.

'I'm sorry to arrive unannounced, but I had to see you.'

'It doesn't matter, you're welcome.'

'Why do you never telephone?'

'I was talking to you on Tuesday.'

'Yes, but I hoped you would ring today.'

'How was I supposed to guess what you were hoping? Why didn't you ring?'

'I was afraid you didn't want to see me.'

'But you know that I like seeing you.'

'Yes, but I also know that you think I'm too young.'

'Yes, you are. I want us to be friends, but I don't want to tie you down. On Saturday evenings you should be going out and enjoying yourself with young people, not sitting indoors with me.'

'And if I don't enjoy myself with young people, if I'm only happy in your company, what am I supposed to do then?'

'You will have to find out for yourself, we have no future together. You must find a younger man.'

'Why do you say that?'

'You are too young, you do not realize that what you think is everlasting love is simply an illusion. It vanishes when everyday life takes over. Then only the age difference is left.'

'I don't believe that. If you love me, you want to be with me all the time too.'

'I like you. And that is exactly why I don't want to tie you down.'

He likes me. He does not love me. I might just as well accept it and learn to live without him.

I knew that the island boats serving the Stockholm archipelago were looking for staff. That would suit my plans well. If I could get work on the boats in my holidays, I could live on board and he would not have to meet me for the rest of the summer. By the autumn perhaps I might have managed to forget him.

7 S/S Tor III

The gulls rose, screaming, as the island boat, Tor III, set out from the quay. It was raining, and men on the way home from their offices sat frozen and silent on their seats. Some took out their evening papers while others began to fall asleep to the thud of the engine. Another working day was over and I could feel the happiness of expectation behind their expressionless faces. Out in the country the family was waiting, with the table laid, the laughter of children, a wife's love. Everyone was happy, everyone had somebody waiting for them. But I had no time to examine my fate, the orders were beginning to pour in.

'Can I have a cup of coffee, Miss?'

'Two Pommacs, please.'

'Two coffees and two mazarin cakes, as quickly as possible.'

'Can I have a steamer steak? The wife's gone off to Sandhamn, so I'll get no food at home,' said a very stylish-looking middle-aged gentleman in an impeccable white suit.

I bustled about, but could think of nothing but the (in my view) wicked wife, who was not there to meet her husband when he came home tired after the day's work. Or could it be that she didn't love him? Then why did they get married? I could not understand people getting married without love. I would never be able to do that. Nor would I be able to make up to someone else's sweetheart, like Bella, for instance.

After the first few days at sea I had rung up Annmarie. She was glad to hear from me and willingly told me about her summer in town, her escorts, and the journey she was planning to Gotland. She had been taken out often and mentioned that the evening before she had been at Bäckahästen and seen Marton accompanied by Bella.

'Is it over between you?' she asked.

'Yes,' I said, trying to sound completely cold, while a sharp knife was turning in my breast. There you are, I was thinking, it's beautiful Bella he prefers.

'That can't be right, I'm sure you're still in love.'

'What does that matter,' I said, 'when he isn't interested?'

'I don't believe that either. It didn't sound like that last time I met you both. In fact I think Bella is trying to get her hooks into him, she's the type.'

'Why do you think that?'

'The way she was behaving looked like that to me. I was observing her all evening. She didn't see me. Marton seemed totally uninterested.'

'If he asked her out, he must make the best of it. I don't plan to see him again.'

'How do you know that it wasn't Bella who asked him out? She really looked as if she was busy offering herself altogether.'

'Do you think so?'

'I'm convinced of it.'

I did not know what to believe. At all events those two had disappointed me deeply. Marton, whom I so much wanted to love me, and Bella, who I thought was my good friend. Even if she had not asked him out, I found it difficult to understand how she could go out with the man she knew I was in love with. That was a betrayal I would never forgive. My mother's voice rang in my ears: 'Never trust your friends, the one you think is your best friend will be the first to let you down.' I had never taken her words seriously, I had seen them as her jealousy, her attempt to alienate me from my friends. Why had I refused to realize that she was right? You only learn through your own mistakes, your own pain.

I lay down on my bunk, still thinking about Marton and Bella, when there was a soft knock on the door. What did they want now, in the middle of the night, I thought, aren't I allowed to sleep when I've gone to bed? I pretended not to hear, but the knocking became more and more insistent.

'Who is it?' I asked in the end.

'It's me, Kalle. Let me in.'

Kalle, the ship's boy, had tried several times to come swimming with me, but I thought I had made it clear to him that I did not want company. And now he was knocking on the door. What did he want?

'What do you want?'

'I want to come in.'

'So late at night? I'm already undressed, I'm in bed.'

'That's exactly why I want to come in. You never let me go bathing with you, so perhaps I can come in now.'

'I can't let you in, I want to sleep.'

'I want to sleep with you.'

'You're crazy, go away!'

'Open the door. Do you think you're too grand for me?'

I did not answer, hoping that he would go away soon. But he just went on knocking, and when the shouting and knocking were really loud, I suddenly heard the captain's voice:

'What's this racket? What are you doing here, Kalle?'

'Hanna asked me to come to her room and now she won't let me in.'

'Well, to hell with her then, what are you making such a row about?'

I simply could not swallow that. I was supposed to have asked him to come to my room? I put something on and opened the door.

'It's not true. I never asked him to come. The truth is that he has tried to keep me company several times and he apparently refuses to understand that I am not interested. Perhaps it's usual in Sweden for girls and boys to sleep together, but in the country I come from you only sleep with the person you're married to.'

The captain listened to my lengthy tirade, turned to Kalle and said:

'Go away and leave the girl in peace. Don't do this again if you want to stay on the boat.'

There was a hoot from the boat as it slowed down at the first jetty. Two children, aged perhaps five and nine, were waving a welcome to us as we approached. There was a stab at my heart when they fell into the arms of one of the men alighting, but I had no time to stand about dreaming, I had to rush off with the next order.

When the boat finally reached its night harbour at Kummelnäs I was done for. Tired and sweaty, I went to my cabin, sat on the bunk and looked out through the little porthole. The rain had stopped and the sun's disc was reflected in the still lake. Along the beach the shadows of the tallest fir trees were lengthening, but the wide band of sunshine shimmered as it reached towards my window. Not a blade of grass trembled, nature was at its evening prayers.

I could not resist the inviting waves and changing quickly into a swimsuit I jumped into the water. I swam towards the sun, my spirits lifting, and as my arms transformed the golden satin into a million shafts of light the tiredness vanished from my limbs. I turned over on my back, and lay motionless for a long time, staring at the blue that made me dizzy. The water was warm, the air milky, and the birds were preparing for the night. Now I was no longer myself, I was the sea, the sky and the birds, one with everything around me. I felt heat rising, that slowly overflowed, I wanted to be both within and at the same time encompassing everything there. Nature held its breath, time had ceased to exist.

I jumped when a coot flew up close to me and I became aware of my surroundings. The spell was broken, I began to swim towards land. The sun was close to the horizon when I reached the boat and put on my clothes.

When I went off for a walk later on, raindrops were glittering in the trees and the grass was still wet. I strolled along the beach and the wooded slope covered with blueberries awakened memories of my childhood summers. I stooped to pick some, wondering if I might be doing something forbidden, when I became aware of a red cabin in the distance. Rights of access were a closed book to me, I did not even dare to imagine that all this was free to everyone. Quickly, quickly, before anyone could come and stop me, I picked handfuls of berries and stuffed them in my mouth, before turning away, sated with the fruit, to walk slowly back to the boat.

When I got back the sun had almost vanished into the sea. I set about my customary duties: cleaning up for the captain and the pilot, taking water to the cabins, preparing for the night. After a few hours' sleep it was time to start cleaning again and then to serve breakfast to the surly, sleepy men. The morning was palely grey, rain hung in the air. Gone was the smiling face of nature, the evening's golden gleam; now the islands we passed looked like the outskirts of the underworld, grey and inhospitable rocky outcrops, with an impenetrable latticework of rain across them. And it was cold, too. Not as it had been in Sziváros, where the summer rain was warm and caressing. In Sweden the raindrops were icy-cold, harsh as a whiplash.

During the afternoon run I had noticed among the passengers the two children who usually met their father from the boat, with a woman who was presumably their mother. The language they were speaking was not Swedish and I found it difficult to identify, though it sounded like Dutch. She ordered coffee and two Pommacs and when I came back with the tray I could not resist asking her what language they were speaking. It was Danish. They had escaped from Hitler during the war and now lived in Stockholm. The woman, whose name was Charlotte, described their flight from Denmark in a few words. She wanted to know my story, too, and since I had no time to talk then she invited me to visit them on the island where they were staying. My free time happened to be due the next day, so she promised to meet me at the jetty at half-past six that morning.

The yellow house with its white wood carvings looked as if it had come straight out of a fairy-tale, the wood and fields round about were the fairies' enchanted playgrounds, and it was easy to see elves dancing behind the house in the thin morning haze. The boys were still asleep and she told me that her husband was away. Charlotte made coffee and brought breakfast to the jetty. We talked, we swam, and when the boys were awake we went out in the boat. In the evening, when it was time to go, I found it so difficult to leave my new-found friends, I would have liked to stay all summer long. To have what Charlotte had,

a wonderful family, a wonderful summer place. How happy she must be!

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It was my last day on the boat, and although I had enjoyed myself I was looking forward to being back in town. I made a rough estimate of how much I had earned during the summer and it looked as if I had made a profit. My wages were needed for the rent, but what I had accumulated from tips might stretch to a new blouse. I had seen a very pretty blue one in Robell's window, which I really wanted - though it was certain to be much too expensive, so perhaps I should look in at Epa instead. This was my last trip, and when the boat had docked I was to see Mrs Boman, to receive my pay. I had no idea then what a surprise awaited me, how much I had still to learn about Sweden. For example, that in Sweden one is never reprimanded.

I knocked on the door.

'Come in,' I heard Mrs Boman's deep voice.

Mrs Boman, the owner of the boat, was a short, masculine woman with sharp, staring eyes. She was stout, but without the motherliness that often goes with a plump figure. She looked at me, and after I had stated my business, she said:

'You can't have any money.'

'Why?'

'You haven't earned it.'

I was speechless. What did she mean? We had an agreement. In my agitation I could not even find the few Swedish words I knew and went over to German.

'I was promised a hundred kronor in wages. I want my money.'

'You have not carried out your duties, you have been lax and uninterested in your work.'

'That's not true. I did everything we agreed on. Cleaned the cabins, and served on deck and in the dining-room.'

'The captain was not pleased. You spent most of your time bathing. Every time he wanted you, you were in the water. He said his room was never cleaned.'

'That's not true. I cleaned it every day.'

'In that case you cleaned it badly.'

'Why didn't he tell me that he was not satisfied?'

'He told me.'

'So why didn't you tell me?'

'The employee must be aware of her duties. The employer should not need to say anything.'

'If you had pointed out that something was not right, I would have tried to do it better.'

'No, it was not my business to say anything. If you take on something you have to perform it satisfactorily. Otherwise you cannot expect to be paid.'

'You can't refuse to pay. I've counted on this money, I've nothing to fall back on. I need the money for the rent, I have to pay it today.'

'That's not my problem,' she said, turning away and walking to the door.

I could not believe that I had heard correctly, it could not be true that she refused to pay, and I gazed at her back for a long time. When I realized that she had no intention of coming back, I fetched my belongings and left the boat.

Back in my rented room, I knocked on my landlady's door and told her about Mrs Boman's refusal to pay my wages. She became very indignant.

'She can't do that. You must go to the legal aid office. They will see to it that she pays.'

'But I've got no money for a lawyer.'

'It doesn't cost anything. It's free.'

A spark of hope flared up. And gratitude to the country that does not allow injustice to pass, that supports the truth and even helps those who cannot pay for themselves. I did as I had been advised, but it took quite a time before right prevailed. Ultimately Mrs Boman was forced to pay, not only the promised wages, but, to my great astonishment, holiday compensation as well, to which I had no idea I was entitled. And the period on the boat had taught me other lessons as well.

When I had taken the job I had decided to live on board for the whole month. It had been easy to keep to my decision as long as the boat was anchored in the archipelago, but when we spent the night at Slussen it was more difficult. After the first three days I returned to my rented room on the pretext of getting a change of clothes, but it was really to find out if Marton had been in touch. My landlady greeted me with the news that Marton had tried to get hold of me several times. He had been upset that I had not talked about my plans, that I had simply disappeared without telling him anything. He did not want to believe that I would be away for a whole month, and if I rang up she was to tell me that he wanted to see me as soon as possible.

So he was not quite unmoved either.

Then why all that talk about age difference, about the impossibility of being together? What is more important than that two people love each other? Isn't that more important than anything else? Concern over age difference is simply a convention, what matters is the feeling of affinity, that two people care for one another.

But it would be another two years before he realized it too.

8 London

It was the spring of 1948. I was still working at the little office to which the director of the American Express had recommended me. Now that I was proficient in both typewriting and shorthand, the director, Mr Lansing, showed his satisfaction by increasing my wages step by step, and I had every reason to be pleased. The work had become routine by now and my leisure time was beginning to feel empty. The loneliness was hurting, the ceaseless longing left a bitter taste. It was not the Saturday dances, the fun with friends that I longed for, all of that seemed to me meaningless. I yearned only to be with Marton, but he still thought I was too young.

After my return from the island boat Marton rang up and all my resolutions about being distant vanished. His voice brought me back to a state when I no longer cared what he thought, if only I could be near him. So when he asked if he could see me I said 'Yes' without even thinking. And in no time we were back on the same footing as before. I was in love and went to our meeting filled with hope, only to part, after his admonition to find someone else, forced to realize once again the impossibility of our relationship. I could not understand him, did he love me or not? Sometimes I was certain that he did.

It was my birthday and I was on my way home from the office, hoping that Marton would remember and come to congratulate me. I must have forgotten to shut the window that morning, because it was still ajar, and when I unlocked the door I found a briefcase on the floor. I picked it up, read the firm, hand-written note: 'Congratulations on your birthday M.' and was furious. What cheek, throwing something in through the window! Not even taking the trouble to wait for me, when he had actually been there. Throwing in a present, just in passing. I didn't want his present.

Without further thought I took my bike and cycled off to Bromma. My fury grew the further I travelled, I was raging at him all the way. I hated him,

and in my thoughts I broke all the bonds there might have been between us. I never wanted to see him again, if I meant no more than that. On reaching Stopvägen I propped my bicycle in the doorway, walked up the stairs and hung the briefcase on the door handle of his room.

As I bicycled home again my anger began to subside. Now, having returned his gift, I felt easier, but the decision never to see him again was still firm. Calmer now, I also began to feel hungry, and when I reached Humlegården I stopped at the kiosk, bought a packet of Marie biscuits and sat on a bench. As I ate I thought over how all this had come about. Why had I fallen in love with Marton, why was I unable to resist him, when he had shown me again and again that he did not care for me?

The next evening there was a ring at the doorbell. It was Marton.

'Why did you do it?'

'Do what?'

'Give back my present?'

'You must understand that I can't accept something you just throw in through a window. It's as if you were throwing a bone to a dog!'

'What do you mean - I thought you wanted a briefcase?'

'How could you just sling something in like that, don't you realize that you humiliated me?'

'And what about me, how do you think I felt, wasn't I humiliated? I come home late in the evening after a difficult meeting, and find the briefcase hanging on the door! I thought you would be pleased.'

'That's funny. You feeling offended.'

'Don't you understand? I so much wanted to give you pleasure on your day, and as I had an important meeting in the evening there was no other way of giving you the present.'

'It's not the present that's important. Couldn't you work out how I would feel, finding something on the floor? Not even wrapped, just thrown in.'

The neighbour's door opened, Mrs Andersson was on her way out with the rubbish.

'Can't I come in?' asked Marton.

It was only then that I noticed we were still standing in the hall.

'Please do,' I said, as coolly as I could manage.

'So you intend to go on sulking? Although I'm the one who's hurt.'

'You have no reason to be hurt. Try to put yourself in my place. How would you have felt if I had thrown a present into your room?'

'I would have been glad of the thought.'

'Thanks for the thought, then.'

'But surely you must see that we're different, I can't think in the same way as you.'

'No, and you can't love me in the same way, either.'

'Where did you get that from?'

'You're always telling me I must look for someone else, so perhaps it would be just as well if I did.'

'Do you mean that?'

'Why did you ask my landlady to tell me I should come back from the boat, when I had quite decided to break with you? That was exactly what you wanted, so why did you ask to see me again? Answer!'

'It's not that simple. I still think you're too young, I haven't the right to spoil your future. I feel guilty all the time, we can't go on like this, it's shameful.'

'What do you mean?'

'You know exactly what I mean. It's wrong for us to meet, and it would be wrong to tie you down by getting married.'

'And you know what I think. I love you, and I shall never be able to love anyone else. Do you want me as your wife, or do you want me as your lover, it's for you to decide.'

'You're so young...'

And so my resolutions were blown away all over again. His arms told me all over again that this was where I belonged. The briefcase was forgotten, my anger was forgotten, there was only him, and his kisses which turned to honey on my fingertips.

'I know what we'll do,' he said suddenly.

'What?'

'We will separate for a while, we'll try to live apart, then we'll see how it goes.'

'Okay,' I said. 'Not because I have any doubts, but if you want to have it that way.'

But Marton rang up the very next evening.

'I've just heard that the Jewish Association in London is offering teacher training to girls who have been rescued from the camps, and they will pay travel and accommodation costs. That would be a good future for you. At the same time we could try being apart. Wouldn't you like to go to London?'

'Go to London? I don't know.' But the question provided a good excuse for meeting. 'Perhaps. But it's difficult to talk about it on the telephone. Can't you come over and give me more details?'

'I could do that. When?'

'When would suit you? This evening, tomorrow, any time.'

'Not this evening. Tomorrow I have a meeting and on Saturday I've promised to go and see a workmate. But Sunday is all right. Would you like me to come on Sunday?'

'Yes - three o'clock?'

'Yes, I'll come.'

Sunday shone ahead of me. Just because I had already reconciled myself to not seeing Marton for a time, I felt all the more joyful that he had rung and that I did not have to stand by our agreement. It was more fun getting up in the morning and more fun going to bed, when each night meant one day less to go

till Sunday. It was even easier to put up with the boss's poor jokes. On Friday I hurried to finish in time, so that I could prepare some food. I really wanted to offer Marton something Hungarian, something really good that my mother used to make, but I didn't have access to the kitchen. It was towards the end of the month, and I also knew that I did not have much money left in my purse. I quickly totted up my assets and realized that they gave little margin for extravagance. Without further thought I went to the Co-op to buy bread and cheese, then to the confectioner's next door to buy two slices of flan, and finally I bought three tulips from the flower shop further up.

At home I met my landlady, who had baby-sitting problems on Saturday. Could I pick up her daughter at one o'clock from the childminder? She herself would not be home before two. Yes, that was all right, I finished at half-past twelve. Then could I borrow her Hoover? That meant I could have things looking really nice for Marton's visit.

Waking up to the Breakfast Club on Saturday morning was the most fun of the whole week. With free time ahead of me and now the thought of the coming visit, I opened my eyes. 'Good morning, good morning, hear the birds singing sweetly, good morning, he's coming to you,' I seemed to hear Sigge Fürst's voice from the radio when the signature tune of the Breakfast Club rang out on the air. I dressed quickly and rushed off to the office. The thought that I had only half a day's work made it even easier. The weather was mild and spring was in the air. I had only just begun to realize what Annmarie meant when she warned me against winter in Sweden. I had just worked through my second winter and when the breath of spring touched me it was like listening to a Wagner opera; after the long, monotonous sequences, suddenly hearing the silvery sound of an aria. The air felt as it had in February in my childhood home, when the first wild crocuses were waiting to be picked in the mountains. I had to leave my longing for them outside when I opened the office door and was met by the boss. There was a lot to do

although it was Saturday, but I was happy to do it, the day went all the faster when we had plenty of work.

I spent the afternoon cleaning and in the evening I took out the book about Madame Curie which had been lying on the bedside table for a long time. But I could not concentrate, I was too preoccupied with what Marton had said on the telephone. London. Would I go to London? Imagine seeing the town I had read so much about! Teacher training? That might not be a bad idea. But it would mean being separated for much too long. Of course, we had already decided that we should keep away from each other, but I had imagined this lasting for a few weeks at most, and not for quite a long time, in another country. Should I leave voluntarily, go far away from him and the surroundings where I had already made myself at home, to a foreign city where I would be lonelier than ever? Possibly, if I were to get the education I had always dreamed of, if I could register at a university. But to be away for several years simply for teacher training? No, I certainly did not want to go to London. But I did not dare to say so straight out.

'Yes, I would like to go to London. I've dreamed of it for a long time. But I don't want to be so far away from you.'

'But we agreed to separate for a time,' he replied.

'Yes, though I had hoped you would forget that. And even so, I never promised to stay away for several years.'

'Who said you would be away for several years? No one is going to force you to stay there if you don't want to. We're making use of this opportunity to put our feelings for each other to the test. You go to London, and if it turns out that we really can't live without each other, you come home and we get married.'

At last he had said what I most wanted to hear. Now I could agree to travel, I knew what I wanted, and could hope that while we were apart, he too would reach the same conclusion.

[Double space]

Before I finally decided I wanted to talk to Sara. She was glad to hear that I had a chance to get an education. At the same time she realized that this gave her a good opportunity to persuade me that she and Anders should get married. It was pointless for her to live alone in Skeppargatan, I could see for myself that the only thing to do was to marry. She had already thought it all through, they would take out the licence at once and get married at the town hall before I left. Wouldn't it be nicer to leave a happily married little sister behind in Stockholm instead of one who was lonely and unhappy?

There was something in what she said. I weighed up the argument and realized that she was right. It really would be best for us all if she married now. I tried to work out if it was not simply a case of appeasing my own conscience, without being really convinced that it would be best for Sara, and that their love would last a lifetime. But before agreeing I produced some more objections. I did not want to give in too quickly.

'Are you certain that Anders is not regretting it?'

'Yes, I'm quite certain of that.'

'His little one-room flat is too small, how can two of you live there?'

'Haven't we been even worse off, have you forgotten how many of us lived in one barrack hut? You know it will be all right.'

'Okay, I give in. I hope you will be happy!'

'Hurrah!' shrieked Sara, rushing to the telephone to give Anders the good news.

Next day, in the lunch rest, I went to the address Marton had given me to apply for training in London. I was received by a friendly man who asked me about myself, my school education and my interests. I had to fill in some forms and he signed me on as a candidate for teacher training. It would be a few weeks before all the formalities were dealt with, and meanwhile I could give in my notice at work and to my landlady.

Mr Lansing was a little surprised to hear about my decision, but he sympathized with my desire for training. If I regretted it I could always come back, he said.

Sara's wedding was both a happy and a sad affair. No one could mistake their happiness, as they went up the town hall steps with shining eyes. But my joy was clouded by the thought that my little sister was taking the most important step of her life without our father and mother. This was not how we had imagined her wedding: where were the white clothes, the bridesmaids, the page, the music and champagne? While I examined the paintings on the wall of the town hall I heard Sara's husky 'Yes', and the brief ceremony was soon over. Marton and I were witnesses and after signing our names we hugged the two newly-weds. To set a special stamp on the day, we invited them to lunch at Foresta, the beautiful restaurant on Lidingö, which I knew Sara regarded as the height of elegance.

Only a week after the wedding it was time for me to take the train to Esbjerg, on the way to England. The train journey awakened the memory of another journey, in another life, which I did not want to remember. I held the memories at bay and got to know the other two girls who were also going to the school in London.

They were the same age as I was, with the same background, and the same goals. We had never met before, but it was not long before we became friends. Ida was the younger, and she was dreaming of the prince she was going to meet and marry, and who, she was convinced, was waiting for her somewhere in London. She had had difficulty in adapting to factory work and the lonely life in a rented room and now she was happy to be leaving Gustavsberg. Regina was a few days older, and thinking more about her future as a teacher. She would go on to Palestine as soon as she had her diploma and would not marry and have a family until she was there. She also said she was glad to be leaving Sweden. I was the only one who was sorry to leave and I was the only one who hoped to go back as soon as possible.

Regina, with her long black hair and bulky figure, had felt strange among all the tall, blonde Swedish women.

'I don't understand you wanting to go back to Sweden,' she said. 'Haven't you had enough of anti-Semitism?'

'Of course, but there isn't any in Sweden.'

'How can you say that?'

'People have always received me pleasantly - no one has ever made me feel unwelcome.'

'You're imagining it.'

'I'm not. Sweden is a democracy and the Swedes are kind and helpful to everyone.'

'Haven't you heard Sweden was on the side of the Germans during the war?'

'No they weren't. They were neutral.'

'The trains transporting the German soldiers to Norway - call that neutrality?'

'They were forced to make some concessions, otherwise they couldn't have avoided war.'

'You're shutting your eyes to reality. I know there is anti-Semitism in Sweden. I've felt it personally.'

'In what way? Can you give a concrete example?'

'Of course. I didn't get the jobs I was after, and I have never had a Swedish friend.'

'Perhaps there's another reason. Your not speaking the language well, your own dissociation?'

'No, I know it was anti-Semitism. And I can't understand people choosing to be exposed to persecution again, instead of moving to Palestine. I don't want to wait to be thrown out all over again.'

Could it be true that there was anti-Semitism in Sweden? The Swedes were a little reserved, but also curious about foreigners; shy, perhaps even scared, but not wicked. The fact that Regina had not got the jobs she was after and that people had rebuffed her must lie within herself. It might have been because of her poor Swedish, or her bulky body - that kind of thing can put off some people.

'I still don't believe it. And I can promise you that if I ever feel the slightest enmity because I'm a Jew I shall leave the country at once,' I said, quite convinced that it could never happen.

All this time Ida had stayed silently in the background, completely absorbed in her dreams. Regina fell silent as well and I turned to look out of the window. Now that we had reached Skåne we were met by a springlike landscape. The train, which had left a snow-covered Stockholm, where winter had returned after a few mild days in March, made its way across muddy fields and rivulets of melted snow. A greyish light erased the contours towards the horizon, where the image of our parting at the station was sharply defined. Marton had been so determined that I should go, but his eyes when the train started, the sorrowful look of an abandoned puppy, told another story. His eyes followed the slowly moving train and told me that he had regretted letting me go, that we had not married. The remembered image softened the pain of parting and I too lost myself in dreams while the train thundered on.

Next morning we reached the ferry station, for the second stage of the journey. We picked up our suitcases, got off the train and looked about us in this strange country, Denmark. A photographer with a box camera was standing on the quayside and we had ourselves photographed as a lasting memory of the day which would mean a turning point in our lives, an end to all our trials, the beginning of the good years. I still believed in justice, that life which consists of both good and evil, was going to turn its sunny face to us. We who had experienced so much evil must now have a share in the good. Life owed us that.

Dreams, hopes, would they be fulfilled? Would Ida find her dream prince? Would Regina become a good teacher in Palestine? Would I soon be able to marry my beloved Marton? Everything was still hidden behind the merciful veil of the future.

This was my first journey abroad after re-entering the world of free people, and I was filled with expectancy. How distant now was the little barefoot Hanna

in the Romanian mountain village who had gaped, wide-eyed, at the trains rushing by, from the behatted young lady sitting on the boat to England!

The ferry trip passed uneventfully, and now we were sitting on the train to London. We travelled past dirty backyards, the houses in the suburban streets turned their backs on us. A dismal landscape stretched before us. Stunted trees nodded mournfully at the sooty earth, and the red brick houses with their scruffy bow windows and broken drainpipes did nothing to improve the picture. The washing which had been hung out to dry fluttered its yellow-grey wings in the draught - it was certainly a long time since it had been white. Broken bottles, rusty tins and filthy rags lay about in repellent heaps. The black smoke stung our eyes and my clothes soon became itchy. Dirt was the all-powerful ruler. I felt as if I had been transported to the ghetto in Poland. My senses, accustomed to the order and cleanliness of Sweden, found it hard to understand that I was in Western Europe.

The train arrived at the station in London, where the same dark picture met us, soot and dirt wherever we looked. We took one of those unique taxis and the dirt followed us along the streets all the way to North London, as far as the boarding house where we were to live. But once inside the building, everything changed. The house-mother, a charming elderly lady, showed us round the light, newly-renovated rooms and I felt relieved at the order and tasteful arrangements. We were to live two by two in each room, and the pleasant corner room with a view of the garden, which Regina and I were to share, put me in a good mood. The school was small, there would be no more than twenty-five pupils, and most of them had already arrived. One or two came forward to welcome us and suddenly I felt like the main character in one of the teenage books about girls at boarding school. The surroundings were those of a classical girls' school with strict rules and lessons seven hours a day. Only the school uniform was missing. But the lessons were not to begin until two days later, so I had a little time to become acquainted with London.

Early next morning I began my voyage of discovery. After the house-mother had initiated me into the mysteries of the Underground I was going into central London to see all the buildings I had read about. On the way to the Underground I was astonished at the almost identical houses in the suburb, and wondered how their owners found their way home at the end of the day. All the houses looked so alike that I turned round several times to be quite sure that I would not get lost.

Once in the City I landed right in the middle of the royal couple's silver wedding celebrations, and stopped to watch the royalist fervour. Flags everywhere, royal photographs in all the windows. People perched on fences and roofs to catch a glimpse of what was regarded as the high point in their lives. The gala procession approached and when the open carriage in which the royals sat reached the crowd of onlookers the cheers broke out. The magnificent uniforms of the Lifeguards, the horses' finery, the beautiful carriages, the royal couple's sumptuous clothing dazzled me. I had no idea such magnificence was to be found in reality. The British people, still marked by war, still poorly dressed, who lined the streets, never stopped cheering, the royal couple waved, and the grey street was transformed as if by a magic spell into a glittering festival. Gone was the war and the suffering, now was the time for rejoicing over the present, the beloved royal couple, and the hope of a bright future that I could read in the eyes of the rejoicing people. These cheering people, like me, like my friends, were full of belief in the future.

Bubbling over with the day's experiences, I returned to the school to write to Marton about the fantastic spectacle I had just witnessed.

Lessons began, but it was the letters from Marton that were central to my life. Long epistles, filled with longing, crossed one another and it was not long before he too had realized that there was no point in our being apart. Now he too was yearning, and he asked me to come back so that we could get married. He did not need to write that twice: without even considering the possibility of first finishing my training, I left the school and returned to Stockholm. It took

two weeks to get the licence, and paper in hand we went straight to the mayor. If this were a fairy-tale I would now end with the words 'and they lived happily ever after'.

I did not know then that it is only when the fairy-tales end that life begins. But for the present it was still a fairy-tale. We moved into the sparsely-furnished flat and lived for each other. It did not worry us that we had very little money, we competed with one another at getting by with very little, and saved for what was needed in our home. Fortunately I had succeeded in getting a secretarial job so now we had two incomes. His love was strong and every day he gave me new proofs of it.

'How beautiful you are!' he said, one morning when I woke up.

'Are you joking?' I said, seeing in imagination my hated mirror image. Since I was a teenager I had always had difficulty in reconciling myself to my appearance. My nose was too big, my eyes too small, my hair was straggling and my teeth small. I could not imagine that anyone could find me beautiful. He could not be serious?

'I mean it. To me you are the most beautiful of all.'

'I don't think even my mother thought I was beautiful. Once, when I was complaining about being ugly, she comforted me by saying it was my youth that was beautiful. As you can imagine, that was small comfort to me. Then she promised that I could have my nose operated on when I grew up. Shall I do that now, do you think?'

'What do you mean, operate on your nose? You're cracked. You have a very beautiful nose. It has character. You must never change it.'

'Do you mean that?'

'Of course I do. I love you as you are, because you are you. Your nose is you as well. You must not change your appearance, I don't want you to look like other girls. It's precisely what is special to you that makes me love you and not someone else.'

I am beautiful in his eyes. What does it matter if no one else thinks so - it's only what he thinks that matters.

And later, when I had begun to go to lectures, he asked:

'How was it?'

'Very difficult. Everyone was active but me. They all asked questions, they all discussed, I was the only one who didn't dare to open my mouth. My knees started shaking as soon as I even thought of getting up. I'm never going to get through the exams, I might just as well give up the whole idea of university.'

'Don't be childish. Of course you'll make it. You forget that all the others are used to studying, they have been at school uninterruptedly since the age of seven, many of them have probably also spent a few terms at university. They are speaking their mother tongue. The language is not a hindrance to them. For you everything is new, you have to get used to the language, get into the routines, but you will see that gradually everything gets easier.'

'And you think I shall dare to get up and speak?'

'Of course you will. It's like jumping into cold water. Just a question of making up your mind. The first time it's difficult, but you mustn't give up. You must do it again and again, and one fine day it will be a matter of course.'

'You make it sound so simple.'

'It is simple. You're not stupid and you must be brave. With hard work and perseverance you will go far. You'll see - in a few years you will have taken your exam.'

He believed in me.

Everyday life did not contain much romance, but we loved each other and I did not believe there was another couple in all the world who were so much in love. Both of us had been through hell, and now, together, everything seemed so much easier. The future was no longer threatening. We both had work and even if we were not earning very much it was enough for us to get by. We could even save a little every month. Together we slowly built up our home and every trifle

we managed to buy was a special treasure. The only shadow in our existence was Marton's constantly recurring bad headaches, the consequence of the abuse he had been exposed to in the camp.

9 Marriage

And now I am lying on the delivery table and my thoughts go back to my first pregnancy.

We had been married only a year and I had missed a period. I made haste to drop a test in at the chemist's and really did not know what to hope for. I wanted children so much, but I knew that it was too early. We had been married so recently, we had scarcely managed to get used to being two, and had not yet been able to prepare ourselves for a third. Marton was sitting on the fence, although he too longed for children. I was to pick up the result the next day in the lunch hour and then we were to meet at the self-service in Humlegården. He was not there when I arrived and I was waiting nervously. How would he take the positive result? I dared not be overjoyed until I knew that he too was pleased. We must be able to rejoice together over this burgeoning life that I now bore within me. Of course we had not yet saved enough for all the things we intended to buy, but since we both wanted children so much, many children, I was fairly certain of his pleasure.

He arrived and his reaction did not disappoint me: there was no mistaking his delight. In the months that followed he ^{Spoiled}~~shamed~~ me in all kinds of ways. He scarcely let me do any work for fear of a miscarriage, although I was strong and there was no risk of one. The arrival of Tobias was the best thing that could have happened to us. He made us into a family, he bound us even more strongly together.

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And now more than two years have passed and the second child is on the way. I know that Marton, who is at home looking after Tobias, is hoping for another boy. God grant that I don't disappoint him.

I lie alone in the big room, my eyes fixed on the clock on the wall, counting the minutes between the pains. Is it going to be as difficult as the first time?

Shall I be given oxygen? Why is there no one here for me to ask? Am I supposed to give birth to the baby quite alone?

The pains are now coming closer and closer together and soon I forget the feeling of abandonment I had been experiencing in the deserted room. The staff is also beginning to show an interest, a nurse comes in with oxygen and gives instructions. The midwife investigates and says a few encouraging words. It hurts.

It hurts a lot, and I no longer manage to rest between the pains. I have never felt pain this violent before. Or have I? I put on the mask and breathe in oxygen. The pain does not lessen. I bear down and inarticulate sounds escape my throat.

'The mask - or does she need to help?' I hear the doctor's voice from a distance.

'No, it will be all right,' says the nurse.

It is pitch dark, there is a sweetish smell and a sickly feeling, while millions of bells ring and everything keeps on turning and turning. I sink deeper and deeper, and before my eyes I see the light mask in black. Standing out against the white background like a black photographic negative are the doctor, the nurse, and now also the child they are drawing from me. A thousand hands are pressing on my stomach, kneading and pressing, kneading and pressing, while the bells go on ringing. Are they trying to push my intestines out as well?

'Lie still, lie still,' comes the echo from every corner, and I hear the baby's cry. At last it's over, I think, smiling inwardly, but I have to lie still, otherwise something awful will happen, I'm dying... I'm dying...

'Is it the first child...? first child...? first child...' come the echoes again.

No, Tobias, Marton, my dearly beloved, I must not die, I must not, they need me, must lie still, still, I'm lying still, why do I see this picture, this

photographic negative behind my closed eyes, black juggling hands, black legs trying to break free, that's me, I see myself lying there wriggling, no, I must not move, I must not, just lie still, lie still, lie still, don't die...

'Are you awake now?'

Am I awake? Or dead?

I open my eyes. The white-coated doctor bending over me is pale and looks as if he had just fought the decisive battle for my life. I'm actually not dead, I think, so I must be awake, and I nod. He nods back, pleased to have conquered death, and walks towards the door. It is quiet, no one says anything. I am waiting for him to stop and talk to me, but he leaves the room without even looking back. Nurses are fluttering around, quiet as ghosts, not a word from anyone. Why don't they say something? I want to know if I've had a boy or a girl, but cannot ask. They should be telling me, after all I heard the baby cry, it can't be dead. What sort of women are these, why don't they say anything?

Finally I summon up the last of my strength and ask:

'What was it? Boy or girl?'

'Boy.'

I have a feeling of relief. Really it doesn't matter, the main thing is that it's over.'

'But lie still, there's another one coming,' says the midwife.

Another one... is it true? Is she talking to me? I look up, I'm alone in the room, it must be me she's talking about. But it can't be true, there can't be another one. Perhaps I'm dreaming? Now I have no strength left, I'm sinking deeper and deeper, it feels as if I'm going right through the bottom of the bed, through the floor, and I am far away when a nurse comes and shows me the boy. I force myself to look up and hear myself saying:

'So like my father.'

But the child leaves me unmoved, I can only think about what is to come. Soon it will begin again, the pain, the unbearable pain. I won't get through it

another time. Now I'm certain to die. And while I was pregnant the doctor was so certain that I was not carrying twins.

Now it begins again. The pain is coming, I breathe inside the mask, and the same scene is repeated, the darkness, the bells ringing, the negative behind my eyelids, the waving hands, the difficulty in keeping still, the certainty that I shall die if I do not.

I wake up to the midwife's voice:

'It's over now, Mrs Prager, it's over.'

I hear the baby's cry and let out my breath. The after-birth is squeezed out and it's all over.'

'Another boy,' says the nurse.

Another one, I think, without really understanding the meaning of the words. I am completely exhausted and it is some time before I manage to ask:

'Can I see him?'

'He has to be seen to first. Lie still, you can see him, then you must rest.'

A few hours later I am wheeled up to the ward with the two babies beside me, filled with pride and joy. The feeling of having once again performed a great deed, pride in the new life breathing beside me, whisper that this is the reason for our survival. Our parents will live on in our children, who will bear their names, and they will be taught to remember. I felt as if my body had been beaten black and blue, but it no longer had any importance, everything that had happened was already forgotten, now only the future counted.

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Everything was much easier now than the first time, when as a new and uncertain mother I scarcely dared to go near the baby.

On top of it all, I had too little milk that first time and was depressed. I had read all the latest books, Dr Spock was my bible, and I followed the paediatrician's recommendations to the letter. I had learned that children should be fed at specific times and that it was important for them to have only

the amount prescribed by the doctor. They should never have a bottle between meals, bottle babies were so easily over-fed. I measured out exactly 50 ml of formula for each meal and to start with Tobias slept so sweetly.

He was most beautiful when he was asleep. I could stand beside the bed and look at this miracle, this little life, which had come to us like a confirmation of our love. I sniffed up the baby's smell, which was like acid sweets. I wanted to protect him from everything and my love enfolded him like a steel mantle which would protect him from evil to all eternity. What kind of life might be waiting for him? I was convinced that he was born to a better world than the one I had been born into. I believed that the evil which had so recently held sway could not possibly rear its head again. It was easy to recognize now and could never again have power over the earth. The world had learned a lesson, it would never allow anything like that to happen again. Now everyone knows that evil leads nowhere, it simply becomes an avalanche which ultimately overwhelms itself as well. Tobias will grow up in freedom and develop in a free country among good people.

But this was still a long way off.

The baby woke up and cried. I looked at the clock, he was not supposed to feed until two hours later. He had no right to cry, but he was doing it just the same. I resisted the impulse to pick him up and leaned helplessly over the cot. I did not know what to do and my tears began to flow. I was not allowed to pick him up, children must not be spoilt by being picked up at any old time. They must get used to specific times and regular habits. But he just went on crying and in the end, with a big pang of conscience, I lifted him out of the cot. It was no good, he was inconsolable.

'Perhaps he's hungry?' said Marton.

'No, he can't be hungry. It's only two hours since he ate and he had exactly as much as he should.'

'Perhaps he needs more?'

'No, we mustn't give him more. You know the doctor warned us, he will just get fat and clumsy and never learn to walk.'

'Can't you see that the baby's hungry?'

'I don't know. I daren't give him any more, you know they say the same thing in the books. But I'll telephone the Children's Welfare Centre on Monday and ask.'

'You can't wait till Monday, he's hungry now, poor little thing. I'll go and mix up some formula.'

'No, you mustn't give him any more,' I said, and left the room.

Marton took no notice. He stole out to the kitchen and prepared the bottle without my seeing him. Then, when the baby was calm, I was convinced it was the result of my consistent behaviour, that he had adapted to the regular mealtimes. It was only later that I learned Tobias's happy smile was caused by the double contents of the bottle.

When, later on, I had three small children to look after, everything actually was much easier. I had learned not to take everything so seriously, to rely more on my instinct than on books.

Sara had also had two children, and outwardly everything seemed wonderful. But Sara was not happy. She suspected Anders of cheating her, and though she was not quite certain, she was very jealous. She began to talk about divorce. Rather than saying 'What did I say?' I rang up Anders.

'Anders, I hear that you're having affairs behind my sister's back. Is it true?'

'No, it's not true.'

'Why does Sara say so?'

'She's unhealthily jealous.'

'But it can't be just that.'

'Yes, it is that. As soon as I speak to a woman she thinks she's being deceived. You know I travel a lot, she won't accept that a salesman has to travel, she believes that I go off to meet my lover.'

'I find that hard to believe.'

'Well, I can tell you something that happened the other day. My secretary rang up when I was on my way to England and because I had already gone it was Sara who answered. "Why are you ringing?" she asked, getting upset. "He was going to London with you." Doris replied truthfully that she was not going with me. Sara scarcely listened to her answer but attacked her with accusations of having a relationship with me. You can imagine my secretary's surprise when all her attempts at explanation were dismissed. She's absolutely convinced that I'm deceiving her. It must be an illness. Nothing helps - can't you try talking to her? She's turning a life which could have been really great into a hell. I'm making good money, we have two wonderful children - why must she go and imagine such things? Can you explain it?'

No, I couldn't. Could it be true that Sara had imagined it all? Anders sounded so convincing that I wondered if Sara really was sick.

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He slammed the door shut and rushed out. He doesn't love me any more, we have quarrelled again. And there was I, thinking our love was unique, that we loved each other like no one else in the world, with a love that would never die. But now I felt caught in a trap. Bound hand and foot. I looked down and was surprised that I could not see the fetters. My powerlessness seemed physical. When I had dressed the children and finally left them in the park playground, there were all the other, never-ending jobs to be done: cleaning, shopping, meals, washing, ironing, mending the children's clothes, and so on. No time left for myself, only unending slavery. Of course I loved Marton and the children, but now I regretted the moment when I had followed him up the steps to the town hall to say yes. Never get married, I shall tell everyone from now on. However much you love each other, you're just selling your soul. And what do you get in return? A bad-tempered husband, children who regard you as their servant.

When I got up to the flat Marton was busy starting the washing machine. The beds were made and suddenly I was ashamed of my bad temper just now. If I were honest, it was just as much my fault that we had quarrelled. It was not the first quarrel, but it was the first time that I had reacted with anger. Previously I had been more upset than angry. Upset about what he had said to me, and still more about what I had said to him. It usually began with a trifle and ended with harsh words. Then I waited for him to say he was sorry, because it was his fault. But he could not know what I was expecting from him, so it was usually I who began:

'Marton...'

'Yes?'

'I would be glad if you said you were sorry.'

'Why should I say I'm sorry? You were the one who was stupid.'

'But I regret what I said. Don't you?'

'Yes.'

'So why do we have to quarrel?'

'No, we mustn't quarrel, we only have each other.'

Now he was the one who wanted to say he was sorry, and that was his way of doing it. It was unfair of me to be angry with him. The truth was that although he had so much to do, he helped with the children much more than I had ever expected. I remember the plans I had made when the children were born. I would get up early and look after them so that Marton could study, now it had at last been agreed that he should take his Swedish exam. But the reality was that Marton got up at six to feed the little ones, while I was allowed to sleep on.

Marton rang up in the morning to say he had invited someone home from his office for evening coffee. Was that all right? Of course, but I must have something to offer. I ought to whisk up a cake, could I manage that? The children slept in the afternoon and I started picking up everything they had managed to get out in the morning. I had also intended to start up the

washing machine and mix a bread dough before they woke up. Could I manage to bake a cake as well? Or should I run down to the Co-op and buy one instead? No, I could not afford it.

I stood at the window without seeing the teeming life outside, it was the sound of my own thoughts that held me spellbound. Was this what I had wanted? Was this what I had struggled for? The endless washing, the endless picking up, the struggle to make the money go round? Marton both studied and worked, he would soon have finished his exams and begin to work in his profession while I sat at home and did battle with the never-ending household affairs. In the evenings I was tired, but I was mostly tired of sitting waiting for Marton to lay his books aside and devote himself to me. And in the evening there would not even be time for conversation. When the guest had gone Marton was certain to want to go on studying. What if I should begin to study too? Then I would no longer be so dependent on him, on his keeping me company. Then the two of us could read, each at our own end of the sofa. If only I could get hold of a child-minder.

I turned away, went on with the cleaning and waited impatiently for the evening, for Marton to come home, so that I could tell him what I had been working out. The afternoon passed quickly. When the children woke up I took them to the playground and when we came in for their supper Marton was already at home. The children rushed over to their father, all talking at once and tumbling about.

'Hi, how was it?' I asked.

'As usual - a row with the boss about an article. He wants everything his way and won't stand for other people having ideas. What about me leaving and doing nothing but study until I've finished?'

'Yes, why not? I wanted to say something to you too, but now I'm not sure if I dare.'

'What is it?'

'I'll have to tell you after the guest has gone. Now I must whisk up a sponge cake. Perhaps you could bath the children meanwhile? And Tobias's car has lost a wheel, could you see if you can mend it?'

'Yes of course,' he said, obliging as always.

When Marton's friend had gone and we were clearing up the cups Marton remembered that I had wanted to tell him something.

'What was it that you were going to tell me?'

'You know my old dreams of studying? ~~well~~, this afternoon I realized that I would like to start now. But if you're going to be studying full-time, perhaps I should work full-time?'

'No, you mustn't do that, you must look after the children. We'll get by somehow. And if you want to study and can manage it, I am absolutely certain you should do it. What do you want to study?'

'Medicine mainly, of course. Or psychology. What do you think?'

'Certainly, that would be a good idea. Medicine takes much too long. Training in psychology takes less time.'

'Yes - I always wanted to be a paediatrician, but perhaps I could train as a child psychologist?'

'Why not? We'll advertise for a nanny so that you can go to lectures and we can both study.'

'Can we afford it?'

'Perhaps we can find someone who is willing to work only a few hours a day. We should be able to manage that.'

The afternoon's bad mood had vanished. Marton always found a solution.

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We very rarely went to a restaurant, it was too expensive, the money was needed for more important things. But this evening we were going to the Jewish restaurant on Karduansmakargatan, and the reason for this brought back memories.

Not yet married, we were sitting in front of the elderly wireless set in Marton's little flat. The silence was broken only by the time signal and we were biting our nails as we waited for the voting in the UN to begin. Would the hoped-for land of the Jews achieve the necessary majority? We had lived in a state of expectancy for several weeks, lurching between hope and despair. If only it succeeded, if only we too could have a country like everyone else, if only we could gain a refuge for the future, without continuing to suffer the two thousand-year-old fear of possible pogroms!

Marton, Roman, his friend at work, and I sat on hard wooden chairs, the naked bulb above the radio shedding an unpleasant light. Marton had not yet managed to buy anything for his new home; he had furnished it with begged goods, things that other people had rejected. Suspense over the outcome made us forget our surroundings, we sat rigid, like sticks, all our senses focussed on the sounds from the radio. We listened to the introductory speech and then at last came the voting.

'You will see, it will be yes,' said Marton.

'Do you think so? I'm not so optimistic,' I said.

'After what's happened to us, the world has realized that people without a country are outlaws. Everyone is now aware that if there had been a Jewish state when war broke out, the tragedy would not have happened. Once there is a Jewish state, homeless people will no longer be shuttled from frontier to frontier. If we get Palestine we can feel secure about the future.'

'What happened can never be repeated anyway. Anti-Semitism is dead for sure,' said Roman. 'I'm not so sure that a national state is the answer to the Holocaust, I believe Garry Davis has the answer. We must work for a Pan-European order, throw away our passports and nationalities, live like brothers. Nationalism is out of date, it belongs to the nineteenth century. Two wars for its sake are enough. I'm convinced that it's not going to be a Jewish state that guarantees our future, it's going to be a united Europe, Pan-Europe.'

'I've thought about that too,' I said, 'and I really hope that Garry Davis will succeed. But at the same time it would be good if we had a country of our own.'

'What are you saying - come down to earth,' said Marton. 'There is no answer to anti-Semitism other than a Jewish state. What you are talking about is a beautiful utopia, but man is not designed to live in peace with his neighbours. Perhaps when the Messiah comes the wolves will dwell with the lambs, but not before. It's only when we have our own state that we can start to dream of a world without frontiers.'

'A dried-up bit of land in the Middle East with masses of Arabs in it, what do you propose to do with that?' Roman teased him.

'We shall make the desert bloom. You've seen what the kibbutz settlements have already done, we shall continue their work. And the Arabs are our brothers, we shall live and work side by side, build up the country together. It's only Nasser who hates us, the Arab in Palestine has always lived in peace with his Jewish neighbour.'

'Don't be so sure,' retorted Roman.

But now the voting had begun. With every 'Yes' came a spark of hope, with every 'No' our eyes grew dull. The votes cast were recorded one by one, and the tension rose.

England: 'Abstain.' 'As expected,' said Roman.

France: 'Yes.' 'Hurrah!' I cried.

United Arab Emirates: 'Abstain.' A resigned sigh.

Cuba: 'No.' 'Aah,' we all sighed.

And so the voting continued: No, No, Yes, Yes, a long series of abstentions from African and Arab countries. Now it was fifty-fifty, and the tension was at its height. It was the turn of the Soviet Union. In this situation it was obvious that their vote would decide the fate of the country. I saw the beads of sweat on Marton's forehead, while I myself was clenching my fists and

I was afraid of the hot climate and that I might not be able to stand it. Although I did not want to disappoint Marton and had never said so directly, he had understood my doubts. When I hesitated, he added:

'If I were younger I would not hesitate for a moment, I would set off at once and enrol in the army. But as things are, we'll wait ~~till the war is over.~~'

Edit rang up to congratulate us on the new-born Jewish state. Behind her cheerful voice I could hear a note of discontent, and I asked her if something was worrying her. Yes, it was, and she would like to see me and talk about it. We had not seen each other for a long time and I looked forward to hearing how she was, how the baby was getting on. But she was not very communicative and suggested that we should meet next day at about twelve, when we would have time to chat while the baby was asleep.

I took the bus to Gustavsberg and rang at the door of the flat on Odelbergsvägen. A tearful Edit opened the door.

'What's happened?'

'I can't stand it any longer. When I got married I thought the loneliness was over, at last I would have someone to share my days and my thoughts. But now I am more lonely than ever. Before I married I had you, my friends, now I have nobody.'

'Tell me about it.'

'Tomas and I have nothing in common any more. He scarcely speaks to me. He comes home late and when he's at home he sits in the kitchen with his mates. He scarcely looks at the baby. What am I to do?'

'I don't know what to say.'

'He doesn't give me any money. I have to scrimp and save with the pennies I earn to get by. It's lucky I have the little one, she's my only joy, she has to make up for everything else - the family I lost and the hope of a new togetherness. She's so wonderful, I hope I can give her everything I didn't have myself. She's never going to have to want for anything, I'll work till I drop.'

'Have you thought of divorce?'

'No, Rebecca isn't going to have to grow up without her father. A bad father is better than no father at all. Do you think it would help if we had another baby?'

'I don't know.'

'My neighbour suggested that. But I don't know.'

This was awful. But I had no advice to give her. Naturally she did not want to consider divorce. Edit, who herself had grown up without a mother, did not want her daughter to have the same disadvantage, growing up with only one parent. And perhaps her neighbour was right, perhaps another baby might bring them together again?

*

It was spring and I was at the Children's Welfare Centre, Tobias had to have a check-up. He had developed well, although he had not been given breast milk. After Marton's coup with the bottle I had realized that he must be allowed to eat as much as he liked, and he had been allowed to do that from then on, without increasing abnormally in weight as a result. Now, nearly a year old, he was a fine little fellow who had begun to walk. It was time to dress him, and I chose a white playsuit that Edit had made. It was important to me that everyone should admire him, I remembered that my mother always dressed me in white and I still had similar ambitions.

'Isn't he sweet,' said the midwife who received me, and my mother's heart swelled with pride. 'Is he walking already?' she asked in surprise, when Tobias began to walk towards a rocking-horse he had caught sight of.

'He's been walking for a month,' I said, even more proudly, barely able to restrain myself from telling her that there certainly wasn't any child in all Sweden who was as handsome and as clever as he was. The ²midwife weighed and measured Tobias, made notes, and nodded cheerfully.

'Everything's just fine. Now you can go in to the doctor, he usually likes to look at the children before the summer.'

We went in to see the doctor, who also expressed his satisfaction with Tobias's development. When we were on our way out he put out his hand and said:

'We shan't see each other again before autumn. I'm on holiday and you will probably be going to the country as well. Sister can make an appointment for you in September.'

To the country? What country? Of course the Swedes had country homes, and it's obviously best for children to avoid the town air in summertime. What if we could rent a cabin, so that Tobias could go to the country too? The doctor seemed to take it for granted, that's how things are in Sweden, everyone is assumed to have a summer place. We shall soon be Swedes as well, after seven years we shall have our citizenship. We might as well adapt to this kind of thing too. . .

'I went to the Children's Welfare Centre today,' I said eagerly, when Marton came back from the office. 'The doctor thought that Tobias would be in the country for the summer, and I didn't want to say that we hadn't got a country place. Don't you think it would be a good idea for us to hire a cabin too? You remember how lovely it was last summer when we went to see your colleague on Värmdö?'

'Lovely? Of course, it was lovely to visit, but I wouldn't want to live the way they did. Having to fetch water from the wood in the pouring rain, go to an outside toilet when the temperature was almost freezing, cook food on a primus stove. What's lovely about that? No, I prefer our warm, pretty flat with toilet and gas stove. If we want fresh air we can always go to the park, it's not far off. In any case it would be much too expensive to rent a cabin.'

'It doesn't need to be, we could share with Sara and Anders. And as to the park being near, it's not the same thing. Think how great it would be for Tobias to be able to run about barefoot, to see cows and chickens, to splash

in a lake and play in the sand. If we're lucky we'll find a cabin right on the water, I would really enjoy that. To be able to jump out of bed straight into the sea, what a dream!'

'It's not my dream, but of course you can do as you like,' he said.

Without wasting time I opened the paper and began to search through the advertisements for a suitable place. Now came a period of feverish searching. I rang countless numbers, took the bus in all directions and walked for kilometres to different addresses, only to find that the ground was too stony, the house dilapidated, or the price too high.

*

August was coming to a close. The summer guests at Kungshatt had moved back to town, school would start soon. The summer cabin we lived in I had found after much searching. It was small and primitive and difficult to reach from the town, which was probably what made the price so reasonable. It had been a great delight to both Tobias and me, but Marton was not so pleased. His idea of a summer holiday did not correspond to the Swedish dream of the country. He was an urban man. Communications were dreadful, unless you had your own boat - and of course we hadn't - you were dependent on MS Sveaholm, which visited the island once a day. It left the quay at Tegelbacken on the stroke of six and it was as well to be there on time. The shrill morning departure signal sounded at five to seven and the few summer guests had to rush down with their hearts in their mouths to catch it. Marton could understand my enthusiasm, but he himself found it more and more difficult to enjoy the primitive country life. I had to agree that he should only come out twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays. And still, all too often, he missed the boat and soon I was beginning to suspect that he did it on purpose. The boss wanted an article, a colleague wanted help with something, he had a headache, the explanations were legion. There wasn't even a telephone for him to get a message through, and if the boat came without him we just had to wait and hope he would come the next evening.

In the evening I prepared supper, dressed Tobias and went down to the boat to meet Marton. After the last passenger had left the quay and I had made sure he was not there, I took Tobias and went back to the cabin. I tried to think out what could have happened, and gradually I became more and more convinced that his excuses were mere pretexts. He was tired of the marriage. He didn't come because he didn't want to come, he had had enough of us, he thought it was more fun staying in town. I got depressed, I got angry, and while Tobias and I ate our evening meal I worked myself into a proper rage. I'm blowed if I shall wait for him, I shan't prepare any food, he's welcome to live in town, he doesn't need to come out to us at all. One should never rely on men, I shall never again believe he loves me. If you love someone you always want to be together.

Next evening, instead of going down to the quay, I went down to the sea to bathe, but had barely had a dip when I heard his well-known whistle. I rushed out of the water, and, wet as I was, threw my arms round his neck. Gone was my fury and all my resolutions, there was only the joy of seeing him again. Marton was full of regret for the day before, it turned out that he had been at a meeting and missed the boat. In the end it was I who was sorry for him, that he had not had any supper, that he had been left alone in town.

'There's something important I want to discuss with you. Let's put Tobias to bed quickly so that we can talk,' he said as soon as we had eaten.

The last rays of the August sun were still reflected in the slowly darkening water when we sat down on the porch, each holding a glass of wine.

'We have so often talked about moving to Israel, we have to make a decision some time. I hope you're with me.'

'Yes, but you know how I feel. It will be very difficult for me to leave Sara.'

'She has her own family now and must lead her own life. You have your family and you have to think about your child's future. Would you agree to my going off to have a look round? See what kind of work and housing prospects there are and so on.'

'Yees,' I said, drawing out the word. Of course I agreed to his going to check up on a possible future there, but I was still not fully convinced that I could be parted from my sister. Perhaps I might gradually succeed in persuading her too?

'But can we afford it?' I added.

'I can have my travel expenses paid to the conference in Jerusalem. Can you get by on your own with Tobias?'

'How long will you be away?'

'Only two weeks. I can help you to move before I leave.'

'No, in that case I'll stay in the country. It will be easier with Tobias. I don't need to take him out here, he plays by himself in the sandpit.'

'As you like. Do you think it's okay for me to go?'

'Couldn't we come too?'

'How can you think that? You can't take a one year-old on that kind of journey. And anyway we haven't got the money.'

'I don't really know. But it would be fun to go.'

'We have our whole lives ahead of us. We shall be able to travel together many times when we have more money to play with and Tobias is bigger.'

I tried to argue a little longer, suggesting that Sara might look after Tobias, that we did have a little money saved, not to put off for the future what we wanted to do today. But Marton was very sensible and succeeded in convincing me that we were certain to have many opportunities to travel. We agreed that he should go, and that we would postpone travelling together to the future.

★

Marton had gone and Tobias and I were left alone on the island. The summer visitors had returned to the city now that school had started again, and apart from the farmer who sold ^{the} milk I had no one to talk to. To make time pass I had developed routines: the day went more quickly when it was organized. Fetching water, fetching milk, and waiting for the post at the same time every day

relieved the loneliness. The August darkness came earlier every day and the nights began to feel a little uncomfortable. Certainly I had never been afraid of the dark, but now I was responsible for Tobias too. After we had gone to bed I listened to the various sounds, the creaking and snapping in the old house, and regretted that I had not moved to the city. In the morning all my fears had gone, the apples were red on the trees and I was a brave girl again. But in the evening the ghosts returned and in total dejection I counted the many days left until Marton got back. But it was not so very long before the pilot on Sveaholm, who knew me by that time, was waving a telegram at me.

'A telegram for me? What can it mean? I do hope nothing has happened to Marton.' I tore open the telegram and read: 'Broken leg stop landing SAS 425 Thursday from Copenhagen Marton.'

Now I regretted having moved out to this god-forsaken island at all, where I could not even talk on the telephone. I would have preferred to return to the city immediately, but there was no connection by boat until the next morning. I began to pack, I wanted to meet Marton at the airport. I would only take the most important things, everything else could be picked up later. What could have happened? I hoped that Marton was not suffering too much, my thoughts were going round and round and I could not sleep.

Marton was carried down on a stretcher with his leg in plaster. When the excitement of seeing him again was over he told me about his trip to Beer Sheba, the taxi-drivers who drove like madmen and the accident which had resulted in his taxi colliding with a bus. Luckily he had no more than a broken leg, it could have been worse. He had managed a lot of sight-seeing before the fateful taxi drive and was enthusiastic about the speed of the country's development. Among the tents set up in haste for the new immigrants there were already temporary dwellings of corrugated iron, while a little further off permanent houses were going up at a tremendous rate. The country was in a state of euphoria

although the economy was very stretched and the struggle to make a living was ruthless. Marton's eyes lit up when he talked about a visit to Jerusalem, where every stone whispered of vanished ages. His happiness at seeing the Holy Land was unmistakeable. But what I had been expecting all the time: 'We're moving!' never came. He scarcely mentioned the traffic accident, but the shock must have been greater than I realized, it seemed to have affected him more than he himself could understand. He regretted that I had been unable to come with him and repeated again and again his desire for a second visit together, but never said a word about wanting to move. And I did not ask; in my heart of hearts I was pleased. Apart from the fact that I didn't want to be parted from Sara, and that the climate in Israel was too difficult, I also thought Sweden was a good place to live in. The democracy guaranteed that we Jews too were able to live in peace, anti-Semitism had no breeding ground here. This was where I now had my home, my family, and it would be hard to begin a new life all over again in a new country, even if that country was Israel.

10 Marton's Death

She woke up in a corner of the big bed, and as on so many mornings in recent weeks she felt alone, lost. Marton was in hospital and without him she was only half a person. He had felt for a long time that he was suffering from heart trouble and now, when an operation became possible, he wanted to have it seen to. She thought of her visit to the ward the day before, their agreement not to meet until the day after the operation, their goodbye kiss. She looked at the clock and thought that by now he would probably be on the operating table. It was to be a big operation, the senior physician warned them that there was only a fifty/fifty chance of its succeeding. Marton wanted to take that chance, and she was forced to accept his decision. He, who had always been so active, could not imagine life as an invalid, and if he did not risk a valve change, that was just what he could expect.

The bedroom was still in darkness, the blinds were down. From the children's room she could hear laughter and shouts, the usual morning sounds. It was Sunday and the children knew that their mother liked to sleep. Now they were a little older they could heat up their morning chocolate for themselves. They knew she would be annoyed if they woke her up, so they let her sleep on. Experience told them it was better to wait until she had slept her fill, and came to their room fully rested. Then she was certain to think of something exciting to do that day, an expedition, a visit to a museum or a theatre.

But today there would be no expedition, no museum or theatre visit.

None of them knew that yet. She yawned, stretched out in the bed and was just beginning to think about leaving its cosy warmth when the telephone rang, sharply interrupting her thoughts:

'Hallo, is that Mrs Prager?'

'Yes.'

'Your husband died this morning.'

The words fluttered in front of the telephone, they could not find their way into her brain. What was he saying?

'This morning...what happened this morning?

Died? Who died?'

After an eternity she heard the voice from the other end of the line again:

'Why are you making so much of it? You knew that your husband was very ill.'

"Your husband"... Marton? Dead? No, it can't be true.

He was to be operated on today and she was going to see him tomorrow. She had been convinced all the time that the operation would succeed, their life together had begun so recently. Fate could not be so cruel, not again, they could not take Marton from her, her husband, her friend, her brother, her father, the man who was everything to her, her creator, her support, her joy. He, who had helped her back to life, without him she did not exist. She put down the receiver and tried to get her thoughts in order. Could it be true? Could Marton be dead? What would happen now?

She lay still for quite a time, paralysed. The children, who had heard the telephone ring, cautiously opened the door and looked in. She could not talk to them, just said briefly: 'Go away'. But she had to talk to someone, she must have help, someone must tell her what should be done. Her head was empty, she was completely lost. She lifted the telephone receiver and rang Sara: 'Come quickly'.

Sara came, and with her help she began to sort out her thoughts.

After Sara had gone she dressed and went out to the frightened children, who by that time had realized that something had happened. She wanted to tell them as considerately as possible, but still it came out like a whiplash.

'Father is dead.'

'No, it's not true.'

Eleven year-old Tobias gazed with big, doubting eyes, as if expecting his mother to calm him by saying that he had misheard her, that what he thought he had heard was not true.

'It's hard to believe, but it's true.'

'No, I don't want it to be, I must see him,' said the younger twin.

'You can't. When someone dies no one can see him again.'

'Just once. Just once more, then it will be all right,' said Lars.

No, it won't do, she thought, you can't let little children see a dead person, it might damage them, and she hugged the weeping children. She herself, on the other hand, could go to the hospital and say goodbye for the last time. The idea that Lars had put into her head seemed more and more the right one, and once again she rang to ask Sara to come to the hospital with her.

Before they left she sent the children in to their neighbour to play.

'Mummy, I shall never laugh again,' said Tobias.

'Yes, you will laugh, you will be happy. Time helps us through.'

The child did not answer, and she left.

She stood by the stretcher in the hospital basement. So it was true. There before her lay her dead beloved, cold, out of reach, gone for ever. His face, so harrowed with pain only the day before, was now quite smooth, bathed in a heavenly peace. Her first thought was: 'You're all right, but me, what's going to happen to me? What shall I do? How could you leave me alone like this? Didn't you promise to look after me for ever?'

'Yes, as long as I live,' he seemed to answer.

He was almost smiling, he looked happy, she could not remember the last time she had seen him so peaceful. The longer she looked at him, the more she too felt bathed in the peace that radiated from him. He was all right now, no pain distressed him, all the problems he had struggled with were gone. She began to stroke his bushy eyebrows, her finger following the gentle arc, and at last she could begin to accept the irrevocable. This was best for him, and she had no choice. She would be forced to learn to live without him.

But what kind of life was in store for her?

A life of loneliness, of worries, just as so many widows before her had experienced. Like Aunt Maria, who after her husband's death never again took off her black clothes. A home where children always fell silent when their mother came into the room, where happiness had been banished.

No. Her grief was hers alone. She would not show it. She had no intention of wearing black, the children were not going to grow up with an eternally grieving mother. They needed living people around them, it was enough to have lost their father, they must not lose their mother as well. She was not going to be like the character in P.A. Fogelström's 'Child of her Town', who after Helmer's death had nothing but death to look forward to.

The tears ran down her cheeks as memories passed before her eyes. The first meeting. Marriage. The lilies of the valley. Their united struggle to build up a new life. The inexpressible joy at the arrival of their first child. His happy laughter at her mistakes in the kitchen, at the burned dishes. Their outings. Their talks together.

It was not only the children who had become fatherless, she too was fatherless now. For the second time. She had found Marton when she had been looking for her father, now she could mourn them both.

When she was back with the children an eager Tobias met her and announced, rather nervously, but with some triumph:

'Mummy, Mummy, I did laugh.'

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Every day was agony. The mornings were the worst. She opened her eyes and reality descended on her like a hammer blow. Emptiness. Pointlessness. Loss. How was she to survive another day? She would most have liked to sleep it all away, avoid facing what was to come.

But she must get up, the children must go to school, she must go to the office.

Somewhere, in the back of her mind, she could hear Marton's voice: 'If anything happens to me, you must take the children and go to Israel. It's sure to be easier for you there.'

But that called for strength, initiative, enterprise, all the things she did not possess just then. She followed the line of least resistance, got up in the morning, dressed, took the car to the office, drove home again. It didn't feel as if she was the one who was doing these things. She was not the one who got breakfast, she was not the one who got the children off to school. All this was done by a lifeless lump of clay, programmed to execute certain movements. Without feelings. Without heart. Without mind. Automatically.

The carefully mended urn was once more in fragments. Would she ever be able to put it together again?

11 Taylor

All the time she felt trapped by the earth's magnetism, countering all her attempts to do what had to be done. Every activity met with resistance, there was no strength in her arms or legs, no thoughts in her head. She wanted most of all to lie still, immobile. Was it the universe's tendency towards dissolution, the great chaos which resisted all order, or was it Marton calling her, did he want her with him on the other side? Only through 'her' stern discipline could 'I' finally drag myself to the desk, ring up the contacts who should be telephoned, write the letters that needed writing. 'I' felt 'her' hard fists grasp the hair on the back of my neck and literally drag me to the office, to the desk, and home again.

She carried out the day's duties as if in a trance and longed incessantly for evening. It was night that was real, the days were just a bad dream. At night Marton came to her, and even if he only came to tell her that he was now living somewhere else, she was still happy to see him. It hurt to hear that he could not go on living with her. She suspected that he had someone else. Sometimes his words hinted at that. And that he would never be coming back to her. It was awful of him, but it was still better than daytime, when he was not there at all.

She counted the hours till evening and did not believe she would survive.

At night he manifested himself, smiling as usual, looked at her and when she wanted to take hold of him, he pulled himself away. But this time she would not let herself be cheated, she intended to follow him. When he began to move away, her feet left the ground, she rose and floated slowly above the well-known streets. Now she was following him in a big red balloon, which swelled and swelled. She knew that the balloon would soon burst, and at that moment she would reach Marton. The children's voices echoed faintly in the background and she was torn between her desire to float onwards and her will to stay and listen to the voices.

When she opened her eyes the anxious children were standing round her.

'Are you sick?'

Was she? Or was it true that he had come to get her? Could she leave the children and go with him? Her thoughts were confused, fever had her in its grip again. She was floating in the middle of the rainbow, where the colours pursued one another. She was riding on a blue ray, Marton on a green one, and round about them were known and unknown faces, each on its cloud of colour. Now she was close to him, she would just climb over to the green cloud as it floated by. The pictures merged into one another, rolled up and smoothed out, people and colours mingled, geometrical shapes grew up and shrank. The elusive storm of colour began to fade and the earlier feeling of frustration gave way to a peaceful well-being which spread throughout her hot body.

The cold cloth slid from her forehead and she woke up again. She asked for water and took some pills. The worried children rang for Sara, who in turn telephoned the doctor on call. The doctor could not find anything seriously wrong and after a week she was well again, ready to resume her lonely life, her life without him.

She opened the door to the little business office that Marton had started the year before and felt his presence all round her. She sat down at the desk, still tired, still indifferent, but the silence felt refreshing. She was alone, no one was expecting her to do anything, the tears which seemed never-ending could flow freely.

For several days she was left in peace with her grief. No upsetting telephone conversations, no intrusive letters. Every morning at nine she went to the office, sat down on the sofa and stared ahead, waiting for the evening.

After a few weeks the miracle happened. One morning when she opened the door, to her great surprise there was a letter lying on the floor. It was an order. The first.

She read the order over and over again. It was from a hospital. They wanted hypodermic needles of the attached pattern. She went over to the 'store' and searched through the shelves until she thought she had found the articles required. Now she had something to do, her brain began to work in time with her hands. Getting out the goods, checking the number, calculating the price, writing the delivery note, making up the parcel, copying out documents, writing the invoice, going to the post. It was not until she was on her way back to the office that she noticed that the whole morning had passed without her having shed a single tear. A hope began to dawn: perhaps, perhaps she would be able to carry on the firm? No, futile thought, how could she possibly do it all by herself, she who had not a vestige of business sense? Without having Marton there to ask, how could she know what to do, how to do it, how could she take decisions, she was no businesswoman, had never had the slightest gift for it. She was not even interested in money, the only thing she wanted was to earn enough to be able to give her children the essentials, to be able to bring them up, help them on to an acceptable life.

Three days later the goods were returned, the client had ordered short-ground needles and had received long-ground ones. It was then that she really understood how difficult it was to run a business. Products, similar samples, were not necessarily identical. She would have to learn a great deal, teach herself about the products, teach herself selling. If she was to be able to carry on the business she would have to familiarize herself with a number of things: sick care, medical requisites, marketing, business management - she had better go and buy the books and begin to study.

She stopped at the nearest bookshop and bought some books on anatomy and business management. It was almost one o'clock and for the first time in weeks she felt hungry. She stopped at Måster Anders, the local restaurant on the corner, went in and ordered grilled sausages and potatoes. While she was waiting for the food to arrive her old ego woke up, took out pen and paper and began to

plan the coming days. Ever since her schooldays she had been used to organizing her day, planning homework, writing down what exercises she had and how long they should take. Then she would tick them off one by one and when they were all done she could go out with a good conscience and see her friends. This had always helped her to get started on what had to be done, and satisfaction at finishing the separate tasks relieved the boredom of the homework.

She would do the same now. If she organized her day and fitted in all the work ahead hour by hour, she would also manage to study, and bit by bit perhaps acquire enough knowledge to run the business. That would also mean she would have less and less time to cling to her grief.

She read books, she looked for people she could ask for advice, she became active. At the same time orders began to arrive from clients, and letters from suppliers. She learned from her mistakes and the slowly increasing correspondence gave her satisfaction and the stimulus to continue. Some letters from suppliers mentioned their doubts as to whether she, as a woman, was the right person to handle their products. It felt like a challenge: perhaps she could succeed in showing them...?

A telegram arrived from England:

'Condolences on bereavement stop owing to your husband's death we would like to revise our contract stop coming to Stockholm Monday 26 at 15.30 stop Taylor.'

She read through the telegram several times. The forthcoming visit made her pull herself together and think through the situation. Mr Taylor must not meet a weak, grief-stricken woman, she would show her strength and make him believe in her.

On the afternoon of Mr Taylor's arrival she went to the hairdresser for the first time in ages. Then she dressed carefully in a grey suit, a red blouse with a bow, and black, high-heeled shoes. She even put on a little lipstick, and when she looked at herself in the glass she was surprised. The woman who looked back at her did not fit the mournful picture she remembered from that

morning. Pleased with the result, and full of confidence, she drove to Arlanda to meet her guest.

Mr Taylor was a fresh-faced Englishman with the beginnings of a pot belly, ruddy cheeks and shiny hair. With his leisurely manner, he did not look as if he would be easily disconcerted. He was friendly and gave her immediate confidence. After the usual greetings he asked her about what had happened and about the children and her plans for the future. They sat in the car and as she drove towards the city she told him of her decision to continue Marton's work and her conviction that she would succeed.

'How long have you been driving?' he asked suddenly.

What was this? Didn't he think she drove well? Perhaps he was afraid of being in a car when he was not at the wheel. Might he have a phobia about driving? In any case she had no intention of telling him that her driving licence was new, that she had learned to drive shortly before Marton's death.

'Not very long, but I very much enjoy driving.'

'I see. Would you mind if I took over?'

What could she say? She had better let him drive.

'Okay, we'll change places.'

When she saw how much more slowly he drove, she began to realize that perhaps it was the way she drove that he disliked. It was many years before she learned that he had never been so frightened in his life as when he drove with her from Arlanda.

They arrived at the hotel and she waited in the bar while he checked in. Well-dressed, serious men, deep in what she thought must be business conversation, were sitting round her and she felt a shiver of expectation - would she pass the test? Would she eventually succeed in becoming a businesswoman? She was forced to rely on her intuition - she knew nothing about their world, what to say, how to say it, how to do business. Even the few words that reached her ears were incomprehensible. But she was certain she could learn the vocabulary.

Mr Taylor came into the bar with a big box of chocolates in his hand.

'For the children.'

That was considerate of him. There was warmth in his voice, he was not at all like the cool young men in the bar. She knew instinctively that she could rely on him.

They drove to the office, which was in a grand, turn-of-the-century house on Norr Mälarstrand, with big windows facing the Mälar. After parking the car, she showed the way through the big oak door flanked by caryatids. They walked to the elegant, mirror-lined lift and she noticed Mr Taylor's appraising glance while it made its way very slowly to the third floor. When they were there the lift stopped with a ponderous rattle and they got out. She unlocked the door to the office, an office which could not have made any great impression on the director of the big English firm. It was simply a large, sparsely furnished room, and the only thing that was impressive was the view. A huge, antique oak desk stood grandly by the window, a black leather chair before it, a beautiful sofa with pink silk upholstery from about 1800 along one wall and a big mahogany table with period chairs in the middle of the room gave the impression of a living-room rather than an office. The absence of rugs, pictures and other things that give character to a room contrasted with the elegant furniture and underlined the room's lack of identity. It was not a drawing-room, not a dining-room, not a study, and absolutely not an office. It was just a room. She pointed proudly to the 'store', a shelf along the long wall where a few of the English company's products were also kept.

She talked incessantly, not daring to stop, trying to cover her uncertainty with words, and when she reached the programme of planned visits to customers, the director interrupted:

'Do you really believe you can carry on the business now you are alone?'

'I'm sure of it,' she said, swallowing her doubts.

'How are you going to do everything yourself?'

Now she had to invent something she herself did not really dare to believe in: a bigger office, several employees, and high future sales figures for his products

'To start with I intend to employ a secretary, and as soon as I've got the sales up I shall employ several salesmen to travel the country, an accountant, a storeman and a driver. I believe in the future in Sweden and I know I can sell your products. The turnover is going to increase in the same way as you previously expected, hospitals need catheters and I intend to convince them that yours are the best. Next year I shall move to a bigger office, and I can assure you that you will be pleased.'

He listened attentively and was silent for a while. Slowly he nodded, and then spoke:

'I understand. You are ambitious. You give me confidence, you remind me of the days when I myself had started my career, young, inexperienced and hungry. I too began from nothing, I too had my lean years. I believe in you, I think you too will succeed, just as I have succeeded,' he said, looking pleased.

She let out her breath. Her first business meeting had gone well. She had succeeded in making him believe in her. Now she had to retain that trust. Would she make it? Would she succeed with the promised 'high sales figures'? Uncertainty and feelings of inadequacy returned and grasped her in their octopus arms. It is easy to play tough, give the appearance of being capable, it's more difficult to prove it. But her disquiet vanished as she listened to his account

'I was newly married and poor. Grandfather had just died, leaving a small, newly started industry for the manufacture of rubber catheters. I was to inherit it, but I knew nothing about such things. What I did know was that I had to care for my wife and quite soon for the baby she was carrying as well. So I bought books and asked advice from the few employees who had come with the firm. In order to begin manufacture, a large number of rubber stoppers were needed, which I had not enough money to buy. What to do? As I went round pondering the answer I found myself down in the yard, where I caught sight of a heap of

used corks. A wine producer worked in the same building and the used corks from returned bottles were simply thrown out into the yard. How about using cork instead of rubber? I went to the wine producer, bought up the used corks and started to manufacture catheters with cork instead of rubber stoppers. I succeeded, sales went well, and now I was able to buy rubber stoppers for the next stage. But I shall never forget how I started, how I managed to convince the hospitals of the excellence of these particular catheters. Since then I have realized that if you are hungry enough, you will succeed.'

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Now, when life was on its way back, she remembered Edit, her former friend from the early days in Sweden. She wondered how life had turned out for her and Tomas and was ashamed that she had not contacted them for a long time. Edit had rung to express her condolences on Marton's death, but at that time she had been unable to speak. It seemed to her that at least Edit was still married. She went to the telephone and dialled the number in Gustavsberg. Edit answered, and she invited her to come over. After a good deal of discussion they agreed that Edit and the children should visit her the following Sunday.

'And Tomas? Don't you think he would like to come?'

'It's a long time since we did anything together. He lives his life, I live mine. When he happens to be at home it feels as if we were each on an island with a whole sea between us.'

On Sunday Edit arrived. It was a beautiful spring morning, so they sent the children out to the park while they sat down to talk and catch up on all the years when they had not met. Edit talked of a marriage which had ended a long time ago. She talked about her lonely life, all her dashed hopes. She sounded very bitter, not even the children could give her any pleasure.

'I imagine to myself that Tomas is dead. Then I'm not hurt every time he behaves stupidly. You know, I'm very good at keeping things at a distance.'

'Are you?'

'Sure, haven't I told you how I survived?'

'No, you haven't actually told me much about your life.'

'No, because I can't remember very much. I remember the day when I came back to our room in the ghetto and it was empty. I imagined that the family must be out doing something, and would soon come home. When dusk came without any of them having shown up I realized that from then on I was alone. I got together with a few other lonely children, we stole food and slept in a cellar, then I can't remember anything more.'

'You came to Auschwitz later?'

'Yes, I remember the cattle truck and the chimney spewing out smoke. I remember a German who took babies from their mothers' arms and threw them against the wall. And a crowd of people lying on cramped bunks, the sleeping planks at Auschwitz. Then it's empty again.'

'What did you do in Auschwitz?'

'I don't remember. Someone was kind to me and hid me during the selections. I was ill, of course, and I think I was in the sick bay, because I remember I was alone on a bunk when a girl took me away. There must have been a selection that night and somebody wanted to save me, because the day after, when I came back, all the beds were empty.'

'You were in Ravensbrück as well - what was that like?'

'I remember the girl who was hanged and that we were all forced to watch. I could not look, so I turned my head away, but then I was beaten with a stick.'

'Why was she hanged?'

'I don't remember. Perhaps she had stolen something, or tried to escape, or whatever, I can't remember.'

'But you must have had a job - what did you do?'

'I have a vague memory of a textile mill...balls of wool we were endlessly winding...beatings when the balls didn't suit the SS women...but we can't have been there very long. I think we were sent on quite soon to Bergen-Belsen.'

'Was it better there?'

'Better? No. I only remember lice and misery.'

'When did you get there?'

'It must have been early in 1944.'

'Surely you didn't have lice from the beginning?'

'I don't know. I only remember how we longed for the rare opportunities to wash, how we took off the clothes closest to our bodies when we could no longer bear the lice. It may have been better to start with, but it got worse and worse all the time, both for food and drinking water, and I remember how we drank from puddles in the yard when the thirst was unbearable.'

'Didn't that make you ill?'

'Either that, or something else, most of us had dysentery. I don't even remember if there was a lavatory, we did what we needed to where we were.'

'But surely you must remember being liberated?'

'Yes, I remember one morning someone came into the barracks and said that now we could go out and get things.'

'What kind of things?'

'Food and so on.'

'Did you do that?'

'At first I couldn't. But after a while I went out too and when I found a barrel of liquid I began to drink. I was so thirsty that I drank and drank, although the liquid was very salt. Now, looking back, I realize that it must have been preserving fluid for herrings or something. But there was nothing but liquid left. Then it wasn't long before that began to run out of my stomach too.'

'What happened next?'

'I must have gone to some hospital - then there was Sweden - and now I'm here.'

'But at least now you have a life in front of you, you're fit, you have two great children, aren't you happy?'

'No, they should have let me die. What happiness do I have in life?

No family, a failed marriage, heavy work, heavy responsibility for the children.'

~~I am also alone - I am with 3 children, I do not have somebody to~~

'But I'm alone with three children, too. I have no one to share the ~~share the~~ ^{responsibility} responsibility with either.'

'At least you have the memory of a husband who loved you. Tomas never loved me, it was a mistake from the start.'

'Why don't you divorce?'

'For the sake of the children. It's better like this for them, even so.'

'So you're sacrificing yourself for the children.'

'I don't count any more. I never did count, for that matter.'

What could she say? She wanted so much to be comforting, but what comfort can you give someone who cannot find meaning in the meaningless for themselves? She did not know.

The days passed. Life went inexorably on. It was still hard in the mornings to be met by a new day after the merciful night, but practical details were gradually getting the upper hand. She began to assess her daily routine and got into the habit of talking to herself. She gave herself roles and changed them according to what needed doing. After Mother had sent her children off to school the Director drove to the office and began the day by reading the morning mail. If an order had come in, the Warehouse Man took it and made up the parcel, which the Office Girl then took to the post. When she got back she turned into the Secretary, who wrote out the invoice and any letters.

The most difficult thing was to make decisions, to decide what products to order, and when, and when and how they should be paid for. Did she dare to rely on a fall in rates, or should she speculate on a rise in the exchange? It was very difficult to settle the various issues, the responsibility weighed on her, she worried all night long and lost even more weight.

She woke, sweating, at dawn, and anxiety caught at her throat. There was no point in staying in bed, she would not go to sleep again. She might as well get up. She got dressed and left the bedroom. Perhaps she would feel better if she did something. But everything she touched mocked her. She went out, but the dark thoughts pursued her relentlessly. After a few hours' vain brooding she returned home, in time to stop the alarm clock and help the children off to school.

She delayed decisions until it was impossible to put them off any longer and she was forced to take a leap in the dark. Sometimes the decisions were right, sometimes they were wrong, making her regret her choice. With time she learned that, after all, the most important thing was to decide, to leap. No one could see into the future, decisions would always have different results, sometimes right, sometimes wrong, and if it was wrong, you had to make a new decision.

She was very cautious and dared not take risks. Every day she was expecting the big bang, but to her great surprise she saw that sales had begun to increase. The business had started to make a profit, and as time went by it got better and better. Quite soon she was able to rent proper office premises with a warehouse attached, take on a secretary, a warehouseman and several salesmen, just as she had promised Mr Taylor, a promise which she herself had not really dared to believe in at the time. Surprise was mixed with pleasure and at the same time she was convinced that if Marton had lived the success would have been still greater. Marton would certainly have known what was right, he would certainly have dared to take risks which would later turn out to be right, whereas her results depended entirely on luck. All the time she was afraid of failure, every evening she thanked her God that she had got through another day, and trembled in the face of the next. Every day she expected the big catastrophe, when her ignorance would be revealed. It was not possible that things could continue to go so well, that everything pointed towards ~~the future~~. *a positive development.*

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One day she had a call from Dr Eriksson, a young laboratory doctor at the isolation hospital, who asked if she could procure a new piece of equipment for him. He had seen a brilliant tube at an exhibition in Boston which was going to revolutionize blood sampling in Sweden. Could she do it? She would willingly try.

A few weeks later she was sitting in the large, elegant Brussels office, facing a big American, Mr John Brannan, and talking enthusiastically about her little business and the successful sales of English catheters. Mr Brannan listened attentively and let her talk without interruption. She asked him for the right to sell the American company's products in Sweden, assured him of her business talents, future successes, and that the results would not disappoint him. When there was still no response to her spate of words she took his silence as a promise and began to feel certain of his acceptance. The future beckoned in ever bolder colours, sales would reach great heights, little Sweden would be their best customer

Suddenly he looked at his watch, and then at her.

'Now we'll go and have lunch.'

Taken by surprise, she stopped in mid-sentence, looking first at Brannan and then at her watch. In her eagerness to persuade him she had not noticed how time was passing, and it was now two o'clock. She picked up her bag and followed him to the restaurant opposite the office complex. It was a large, elegant place, with big tables and menus as big as the morning paper. Brannan ordered a large steak. She remembered suddenly how she and her teenage gang had once mocked at America and the Americans, for whom everything was 'the biggest in the world'.

When the waiter arrived and looked inquiringly at her, she ordered a fish dish, although she was not hungry. Excitement had taken away her appetite and she found it difficult to think of eating anything. When the food was on the table she was fascinated by the gigantic piece of meat which was almost hanging over the edges of the American's plate.

'You must be very hungry,' she heard herself saying. In the same instant she wanted to bite off her tongue. She should never have said that, it was rude, and certainly not businesslike to comment on his order. But Brannan only laughed. picked up his knife and fork and attacked the steak.

While they were eating she asked him about the business, the factory and his family. He talked willingly about production in New Jersey, the manufacture of the various products, sales in different countries, his wife, who was a housewife, and the children, who were still young. They finished lunch on very good terms and she could almost feel the hoped-for contract in her pocket. When they were back in the office and she had just settled down comfortably, he spoke:

'I'm very sorry, but the answer is no.'

It could not have felt worse if he had struck her.

'But...I didn't want you to give me a contract now, right away, before seeing what I can do, but do at least let me try.'

'We're not used to having women in responsible posts, we don't really count on their being able to make it.'

'Give me a chance to show there are women who can.'

He gave her a sceptical look and shook his head. His mind seemed to be made up. But after listening to her arguments for a little longer he said slowly:

'Okay, I'll let you try. If you can really prove that you can sell, you'll get the contract.'

'Can I depend on that?'

'Gentlemen's agreement,' he replied.

A stone fell from her heart. Now she could go home with a feeling of a job well done.

Back in Sweden she tackled the business of selling Brannan's products. It was not until a few years later that she realized that a 'Gentlemen's agreement' did not mean very much in the American business world. It was after the arrival in Sweden of Bradshaw, a representative of the company previously unknown to her.

She had just picked him up from the hotel and they were on their way to a restaurant in the old city. She drove around a little to show him the place, and he was full of admiration for Strömmen, the view from Erstahöjden and Riddarhuset, the House of the Nobility. They parked in Riddarholm and walked the short distance to Tre Små Hus. On reaching the restaurant she ordered herring and reindeer steak, typical Swedish dishes, which foreigners generally enjoy. She thought he had come to help her with sales and she wanted him to enjoy himself.

While they waited for the meal it became apparent that the object of his visit was quite different.

'Tomorrow I'm going to be meeting the director of Sprutor och Kanyler AB to offer him the contract for our goods.'

'Impossible. I have a verbal agreement with your boss. I've already been working for several years on introducing your goods to Sweden, you can't stop me now.'

'Exactly, you have gone on for several years without being able to show any results. Now others must try.'

'You can't just do this. John would never allow it.'

'He's the one who sent me.'

'I don't believe that. This must be your idea.'

'No, it was his instruction.'

'I must talk to him. I'll go and telephone.'

'He's not at home. He's on his way to Europe.'

'Where is he? I must speak to him. This can't be what he wants. We made an agreement. He must respect what he himself called a gentlemen's agreement.'

'He might be in Switzerland or Italy. I don't know exactly.'

'Okay, then I'll go to Switzerland or Italy, and you must promise me to delay meeting this other company until I have talked to John. I'll take the first flight tomorrow morning.'

The food arrived and they ate in silence. Gone were all her ambitions to be a good hostess and he had scarcely swallowed the last mouthful before she took him back to the hotel.

From home she rang for information from SAS on the first morning plane to Switzerland. Then she packed the essentials, ordered a taxi and set the alarm before getting into bed.

Early next morning she went to Arlander² and bought a ticket to Zurich. Once on the plane she turned over and over in her mind what she was going to say to Brannan and how she would say it. On reaching Zurich she rang the local office from the airport.

'He's gone to Bern,' came the answer. To their representative, Zonderbaum.'

She could only take the next plane to Bern and make straight for Zwinglistrasse 28 the address of the Zonderbaum company. The taxi stopped in front of an old, grey town house with tasteful decoration and broad marble steps. The office was three floors up and of course there was no lift. She took the stairs two at a time and was thoroughly out of breath when she pressed the bell. An elderly gentleman opened the door and looked enquiringly at her.

'I would like to speak to John Brannan,' she said, trying to conceal her breathlessness.

The man at the door did not reply, he studied her in silence, thinking it over. She felt his suspicious eyes and suddenly saw this was not the right approach. She could almost hear his thoughts: 'Who is this woman, looking for Brannan? So overwrought, so brusque? What can she want from him? Is she a disappointed lover? Has he got her with child?'

After ^{they} / had been looking at each other for some time she put out her hand and said:

'Excuse me, I really should introduce myself first. My name is Hanna Prager and I sell Brannan products in Sweden. I must talk to him without delay, I have an important question which only he can answer. Is he here?'

'He's not here,' was the laconic reply.

'Where is he?'

'I don't really know.'

'Let me tell you what it's about, then you will see how important it is for me to see him,' she said, and began her story while he closed the door behind her. The man, who turned out to be the director of the firm, did not seem fully convinced excused himself and left the room. Had he gone to check her information or to telephone Brannan? When he came back he did at least have a piece of paper in his hand.

'John has gone to Milan,' he said. 'He's at the Hotel Intercontinental.'

'What's my quickest way to Milan?'

'There's no flight before seven a.m. tomorrow. But there is a train in an hour's time.'

She thanked him, said goodbye and walked to the station. After buying her ticket to Milan she sat and waited on the platform. She had not long to wait. The train came puffing in and she boarded it. It was late afternoon, and by now tiredness and hunger had begun to make themselves felt. She had not eaten all day,

but the train had no restaurant car. She swallowed down her hunger, sat in a corner, hung her coat on the hook behind her and closed her eyes. What was she to say when she arrived? Could it really have been Brannan's decision to hand over the products to a competitor? No, she would not believe it. He had made a trustworthy impression on her.

It was midnight when she finally reached the hotel in Milan. She asked at the reception for Brannan's room number and took the lift to the twelfth floor. Without considering that he might have gone to bed, she knocked on the door.

'Who is it?' asked a sleepy voice.

'Me, Hanna Prager.'

'Mad woman. What are you doing here at this hour? I'm already in bed, can't we meet tomorrow?'

'No, I have to talk to you tonight.'

'Go down to the bar and wait. I must get dressed first.'

She went and sat in the bar and after a time a far from happy Brannan appeared.

'You are crazy, woman, where have you come from in the middle of the night? What do you want?'

'Bradshaw is in Stockholm and he insists that you gave him orders to look for another representative. That can't be right?'

'Unfortunately it is. You haven't fulfilled your promise over the past years.'

'You can't mean that. We have an agreement.'

'I have a responsibility to my superiors, they expect results from Sweden. If you can't produce them, someone else has to try.'

'But I can. It's simply that it takes time, much more than I thought. Let me go on and you'll find the results will be satisfactory.'

'I'm sorry, I can't do that. I would very much like to say this in the charming way these Italians have of saying something disagreeable, but however I say it, it still has to be no.'

She could not believe her ears. All that hard grind in vain, a competitor was going to reap the fruits of her years of work. So typically American, not to respect a promise, simply to go after their own profits. She hated Brannan, she hated all Americans. She would not bother with him, she would go to Japan, get in touch with Brannan's competitors and show him that she could sell. She would succeed, she could feel it, she just needed time. She did not intend to give up.

By next morning all the previous day's energy had gone. A paralysing tiredness spread through her limbs as she sat in the aircraft flying back to Stockholm. At home she was forced to ring up Bradshaw and acknowledge her failure. She had to accept that he would be offering the contract to her competitors, but she would continue with her efforts until Bradshaw expressly forbade it.

It was a few years later when she learned that her competitors were not interested in selling the products - it would have entailed far too much work, which they were not prepared to do. They were not 'hungry'.

13 Romania

They were to gather on the square, people came from all directions with their bundles and bags. Children, old folk and young, younger and older by turns. She could not understand that it could be happening again, that after all that had passed they should once again be rounded up and carried off. And no one was protesting now either. The only difference was that now everything was taking place in an orderly way, quietly and collectedly. The consciousness that this time she had hidden food and money gave her a little comfort; at least this time she would not have to starve. There was a feeling of fear, she did not want to go, but had no choice. They walked past a hiding-place, she wanted to hide, but was noticed and chased back in line. Close to panic, she was just about to rush away when she woke up.

And another time...

They are being hunted out of their homes and swept together on the square. Fear and despair make her cringe - what is she doing now in her childhood home, alone, while Marton and the children are left behind in Sweden? She must get back to them, but where is her passport? She searches and searches without finding it. She has lost her passport. She calls to the policeman, she is a Swedish citizen, they cannot detain her, but it does not help. They sweep her onward. She wants to get back to her children, this has nothing to do with her, she does not want to go to Auschwitz, not again, not a second time, she must go back, children, husband...she wants to scream, but no sound leaves her throat, she wants to run, but her feet will not obey her. Sweating and exhausted, she opens her eyes.

Night after night she dreams the same dream. She is in Romania and her family is left behind in Sweden, she cannot return, she is to be sent to the camp again.

And now they're sitting in the aircraft, on their way to Romania. After long hesitation, arguments to and fro, debates and deliberations, she had decided to visit Sziváros with the children. She was afraid, both for what she might encounter, and of the nightmares that would follow. But the journey was important, the children must learn about their roots, they must see the environment they came from, the town where their parents were born.

She had not travelled very much by then, it still felt quite exciting and scary on the flight and she forgot everything else as she looked at the mountain ranges spread out below the window. She saw herself walking on paths that looked like wriggling pencil marks, and memories of childhood reawoke. Expeditions to the pass, to the waterfall, the campfire on the peak, the first crocuses of spring.

She woke up, her heart pounding. The sun had not yet risen behind the mountain, it had merely daubed the horizon with pastel colours. The lie weighed on her conscience, it was the first time she had lied to her parents. Yesterday, before leaving home, she had said she was going to spend the night with Lilly, her best friend. And now both she and Lilly were lying here under a hay^{stack}~~rack~~, on the way to Pietrosul. What if Mother happened to meet Lilly's parents, who thought that Lilly was sleeping at ~~her~~ house? She was fourteen and war had just broken out. Her cousins were going on a two-day outing, but she knew that her mother would not let her spend the night in the open. Day trips were allowed, spending the night, never. And the only way of going along was by making use of a necessary lie. The boys had so often talked about their nights away that both she and Lilly felt an urge to do the same. They too wanted to see the sun rising behind the 'heavenly mountain', to hear the nightingale's morning hymn and smell the fragrance of the awakening spring flowers by the brook.

The memories that unrolled behind her eyelids aroused a longing for the past coupled with the fear of meeting it, and squeezed her heart.

They landed in Bucharest and she replied in Romanian to the usual questions at passport control.

'How do you come to speak Romanian?' asked the official.

'I was once Romanian.'

'Then you still are. Once Romanian, always Romanian.'

No thanks, I really am not Romanian, she thought, and decided not to let on in future that she could speak the language.

She wanted to rent a car to travel round as much as possible. It was easier said than done, there were no hire cars in Bucharest. Joan, one of her old friends who was now senior physician at one of the town's hospitals, came to her aid. She requisitioned an ambulance with driver, took a few days' leave and made herself available to join the trip.

They drove northwards, and wherever they stopped a crowd gathered round the vehicle. It was obvious that the people were not used to tourists. A man came over to her, felt her woollen dress and said: 'You get given clothes by the state when you travel abroad?' In this Communist country it was unthinkable for people to be able to buy good clothes. Their own were badly made, and of poor quality.

After a few hours' driving the car stopped in a small village, with no cars, where only a few ox-carts disturbed the afternoon peace. They parked by the pavement and went in to a little eating place. There was no menu. They had a choice between maize bread and maize porridge. With the porridge they could have sheep's cheese or milk. The children refused to eat, but she ordered 'tocana cu brînză', baked maize with sheep's cheese, a dish she had once greatly enjoyed. As she ate, forgotten images returned, images of warm summer evenings on the verandah, with the family assembled round the tocana. Had it really happened, or was it merely a dream? Hadn't she and Sara competed to see who could draw the longest strings of cheese out of the pulp? She raised her spoonful of tocana to attempt the same trick - but now it didn't work. The cheese had also probably changed since then.

The children listened with interest to her account, but not even that could persuade them to taste the corn mush. They ate a little corn bread, drank

a little milk, and left the restaurant hungry, hoping to find food in the next town.

When they came out again, there was a crowd round the vehicle. Two officials in uniform were busy writing on a pad, while curious adults and children stretched their necks to see better.

'Is this your car?' asked one of the men.

'Yes.'

'You have parked illegally, you must pay.'

'There are no "No Parking" signs here.'

'You can't park in the centre, it's illegal.'

'How are you supposed to know it's illegal?'

'Haven't you got the same rules in the town you come from?'

'Yes, but there are traffic signs there. And in any case there are no cars here, so we can't be disturbing anyone if we stop here.'

'Regulations are regulations. They are there to be obeyed. Here you are,' he said, giving them the handwritten note of the fine. '2,000 lei, thank you.'

No arguments helped. However hard they tried, the official stuck to his guns. At last she remembered the shopping expeditions of her childhood across the border, when by slipping a coin into the hands of the border guards her parents got them to close their eyes to the newly-purchased coat or toy. She took out a 20 kronor note and handed it experimentally to one of the men. Without a word he stuffed the note in his pocket, took his colleague by the arm and walked off. Nothing much had changed in this country, in spite of Communism. Or perhaps just because of it?

They continued their journey through the once so fruitful ~~corn~~ fields. Now there were unploughed fields, kilometres of wild mustard and weeds. The country which had once been able to boast that it was completely self-sufficient now had difficulty in producing its daily bread. She was sorry for her former countrymen, but at the same time she could feel no solidarity with them. She remembered

with satisfaction how in 1946 she had not yielded to the persuasions of her friends when the letters began to come from Sziváros, and everything had looked so bright. Her former classmates who had returned after 1945 had registered at universities in Bucharest, Cluj, or Timisoara, and the letters might tell of a happy life in a communist state, where academic study was free to everyone. But she had not allowed herself to be tempted, in spite of her hard work to make a living in a strange country. Many times she had felt that she wanted to give up, go back and begin to study, like the others. But an inexplicable something, an inner barrier, had always held her back, and now she was glad of it. All those who had written those happy letters had very soon discovered how the communist noose had slowly tightened, and how the people found themselves bit by bit in the concentration camp that the whole country had now become.

They drove on through the autumn landscape, and the closer they came to home ground, the more violently her heart beat. The children chattered away and to distract herself she made an effort to join in their conversation. They were amusing each other with riddles.

'Do you know this one? It's green, it hangs on a birch tree and whistles, what is it?'

'Don't know.'

'A herring.'

'What? That can't be right!'

'Yes, it's green because it's been painted green, it hangs on a birch tree because it's been hung up there, and whistles - an extra to make it more difficult to guess.'

'How stupid. Can't you think of something better?'

'How about this. There was a German, a Russian and a Bellman...'

Now they had passed the last village and in a few minutes they would be in Sziváros. She armoured herself against her feelings. Inside her there was only an icy cold, and an old picture book.

And the journey continued.

To the house where she was born, to the house where her parents had lived, to her former school. To the town park, the scene of so many events in her life. Pictures flickered before her eyes, a little girl bowling a hoop, two teenagers talking eagerly on a bench, a tragic band on the way to the station...but no, don't pause, go on, go on, to the synagogue, which was no longer there, to the Mill Park, which had been turned into a bathing beach, to the cemetery, where everything was as it had always been. Except that it was in ruins and finding her grandparents' graves took a long time. She commented on everything impassively, talking in a monotone about her parents, her family, her childhood, her friends. She described old memories quite without feeling, as if they concerned a total stranger, or she had read them in a book. Her body felt stiff with the effort of keeping everything at a distance. She knew that the moment she allowed herself the slightest feeling, tears would well up and make the rest of the journey impossible. She did not want the children to see her pain, she did not want to make them unhappy.

They were visiting someone in her grandfather's old village when there was a knock at the door. It was the neighbouring farmer, Jon Illica, who had come to say hallo to the grandchild of his former childhood friend. He had grown very old, and looked with pleasure at her and her children.

'The little one is his mother to the life. And the big one is a copy of your mother. May they live long and be healthy. May the future bring you only happiness and good fortune,' he said, and spat three times in order not to provoke the evil spirits.

A forgotten incident rose up in her mind. She was three years old and howling, she had just been smacked and could not understand why. 'You must not spit at people,' her mother had told her. Why? She had only done what the farmers did every time they came visiting.

Now they were in the town again and as they walked down the main street she might have been taking part in the repeat performance of a play frequently enjoyed in the past. The sets were the same as before, but the actors had changed and the costumes were new. She recognized every scene, but instead of the once familiar actors in European clothes, she met unknown people wearing folk costumes; sheepskin waistcoats, checked aprons and leather swung round their feet. Had it not been for all the well-known buildings she would have thought she was in a foreign town.

Before the war Sziváros had been a very progressive little town, half of whose inhabitants were Jews. It was they who mainly kept culture alive. They had an active theatre, they read the latest news from the capital and they followed the fashion both in clothes and lifestyle. Nowadays this half was virtually completely wiped out, and farmers from the surrounding villages who had taken their place had not yet adapted to town life. The children were astonished at this very different world and took photographs all the time. They can't get any idea how ~~her~~ town used to look, however much she tells them, she thought.

After a week it was time to leave the country. The children were pleased and happy to have seen her birthplace, and met people who had known her family, who had known her as a little girl.

'Now I realize that I had a grandmother and grandfather too,' said the fourteen year-old.

'Didn't you realize that before?'

'I knew, of course, but it always felt so strange. On school holidays, when our friends went to the country, to their grandparents, it was always difficult to explain why I had no one to go to.'

'Now I know that I once had a big family too. Before this I found it difficult to imagine,' said one of the twins.

The journey had given the children a continuity from the past which they had lacked before. What had it given her?

Fear.

Fear of homecoming, fear of the nightmare.

You never get anything for free. She knew that she would have to pay for the children's pleasure, and waited for her memories to overwhelm her when she let go of her armour. Every evening she waited for the nightmares. But time passed and morning after morning she woke up without the dreadful feeling they left behind them.

Could they have vanished for ever? Was it possible that the journey had released her from her painful memories?

Both yes and no.

Sara was waiting impatiently to hear about her trip. While she talked about everything they had done, she felt more and more that she must go back once more. They should go together, back to their childhood, make a pilgrimage without any protective armour, allow themselves to feel the pain and grief for all those who were no longer there. To mourn their mother and father, aunts, uncles and cousins, classmates and friends. She felt the need instinctively, and Sara agreed.

14 Egypt
1972

She was on holiday.

In reality , she had not wanted to travel. She had a thousand reasons for staying at home.

The children, the imminent sale of her business, the snow that has just arrived, and finally put an end to the everlasting greyness. She was afraid something would happen to the children while she was away, and she was convinced that something awful will happen to her. She doubted that the journey could offer to her more than the chance to tick off some more sights, and she could not understand why she had to travel. In any case, she had read so much about Egypt in the past that it almost felt as if she had been there already.

Why had she booked this trip, when in the present situation she knew quite well how anxiety would tighten her throat more and more as the day of departure drew near? But when she really thought about it, she also knew that as soon as she was in the aircraft the fear would go, and the break from everyday life, the expectation of new experiences and new knowledge would gleam ahead of her. Seeing with her own eyes, listening, smelling scents, would leave a lasting legacy that would protect her - protect her against loneliness, help her to survive. And now she is watching the sunrise on the banks of the Nile, where the boat had tied up overnight. The mud-brown heap of clay, which apparently represents a village, is waking up slowly. Up to now only a sliver of sun can be seen, which will soon become a smouldering , burning sphere of fire. She hears an ass braying, and the crowing of cocks from the four points of the compass joins in the chorus of welcome to the rising sun. Further away stands a mangy cur, nothing but skin and bone, which shakes itself and produces a cautious bark. After a few minutes, people begin to wake up as well. A small, sleepy boy in a dirty shirt squats behind the corner of the house to do his business. A bent little old woman with a thousand wrinkles crouches before the entrance of her hut. One or two windows open, mats are shaken out, sounds begin to emerge from the houses.

She walks up the alleyway, wondering at these hovels where people live. Clay huts, sometimes with only a hole for a window. Smoke is beginning to rise from the chimneys, the rattle of household goods emerges. From the other side of the alley comes a soft chanting, someone praising Allah for another sunrise.

Through a gate comes a man leading his ass with one hand and swinging his stick in the other. Is he on his way to the fields or the market? Is the ass to be sold or put to work? Does it make any difference to the ass? To the man?

On the Nile the boats are coming to life. In the slender felucca slowly passing in front of her stands a man busy scooping up water in a bucket, a woman tends her primus stove, while the child gazes sleepily at her: a foreigner, walking slowly along the bank. By now the sun is out and the entire horizon is bathed in a golden light.

Her thoughts move to Andy, the man she met on the boat, to their endless talks about art, literature and the vagaries of life. He knew about all the ancient philosophers, he knew all about Egypt, but he seemed to be so alone. Like her. They sought each other out. She was attracted by his tender, almost feminine manner, his gentle, courteous approach. Perhaps this might develop into something more than friendship? Her longing for someone to hug her, to hold hands with, to run through the fields with, had not yet left her. The longing for someone to receive all the love left unclaimed after Marton's passing still lived with her. They had a whole week ahead of them before the tourists on the trip to Egypt would split up. A lot could happen in a week.

On her return to the boat she was met by Andy and they went off together for breakfast. He too had woken early to enjoy the sunrise and now wanted to know what she had seen during her morning walk. Both of them seemed to be morning people, and Andy asked if he could come with her the next day. She nodded, pleased this was exactly what she had been hoping for.

They were sitting at a little restaurant, at one of the four tables in the

small square, framed by tumbledown houses, dirty alleyways and leafy trees. The sun which filtered through the leaves gave a comfortable warmth, the birds were twittering and stray cats went by, mewling. Scents that were a blend of indefinable herbs and spices, hot oil and warm asphalt were in the air, and a little way off the sharp silhouette of a minaret could be seen stabbing upwards into the deep blue sky. Outside the nearest house the owner of the restaurant stood frying John Dory and giant prawns in a rusty pan. His son walked leisurely over to their table and wiped it with a cloth without a word. They waited, not daring to break the silence. Without asking what they wanted he sauntered on to the next table and repeated the procedure.

At the next table sat four swarthy men, their laughter fluttering like petals among the prawn shells they were spitting on the ground. The wine bottle before them had only just been opened and their good-humoured happiness captivated her.

They were hungry. Should they order? No, said her friend. Here one must not be in a hurry. While they waited she looked about her. The little silvery fish hissed and crackled as they were flung into the pan, protesting against their harsh lot, but they too must accept the way of the world. Eat or be eaten. Slowly they took on a golden colour - the alchemist had succeeded. The cook looked with satisfaction at his work, then lifted his eyes to his guests: what would they like?

At last! The Lucullan meal was served. A gigantic dish of prawns, large white cakes of bread with gleaming sesame seeds, and two brimming glasses of beer. She began the meal with almost religious expectation; the day seemed to be developing into something big, after this nothing would ever be the same again. They ate in silence, listening to each other's inner voices, in wordless companionship. Suddenly the silence was rent by the melodious voice of the muezzin. She knew that this invitation to prayer was a reminder to direct her deeply-felt gratitude to heaven, for having once again been allowed to experience a day of such closeness and beauty.

She dressed with care for the evening masquerade. She had been busy for several days, finding a suitable fancy dress, and now she was pleased with her reflection in the mirror as the female Pharaoh Hatshepsut. She wanted to please Andy and as she made up her face she looked forward to the thought of dancing with him at last, of hearing at last that she meant something to him, too. Next day they would be splitting up, and they had still not agreed to meet after the holiday. Of course Andy lived in the United States, but they could certainly solve that problem: he could live in Sweden, she could move to New York - the main thing was that after so many years she thought she had found someone who could dispel her loneliness. She had gathered that he was not tied to anyone. Had he not said that his mother was very keen for him to marry? And that he had replied: 'No one's going to tell me how to live my life!' He had probably not found the right person yet. But now, now, perhaps... She felt that the past week had given her reason for hope and that this evening would be decisive.

The loud music jarred on her ears, it had so little in common with the soft, Oriental melodies she had become used to during recent weeks. The coast of Asia was vanishing behind the flying clouds. She sat belted into her aircraft seat, her thoughts circling round the holiday that had just ended. Another disappointment, more crushed hopes to be added to the slowly growing rubbish heap of failed attempts at genuine relationships.

The farewell feast on the boat had begun so well. She had spent half the afternoon in the boat's beauty salon being made beautiful for the evening. It seemed to have produced the desired result, since one fellow-passenger after another came over to admire her appearance and her dress, the men wanted to dance with her and paid her compliments. She was pleased, but her eyes constantly wandered in search of the man for whom all this was intended. As time passed, she was forced to accept that Andy was not there. Would he appear later on? Evening passed over into night and still she saw nothing of him. She danced with her newly-acquired friends, joined in conversations, ate at the exotic buffet,

but went on watching the door and hoping. What could have happened? Had he forgotten the party? Was he feeling ill? Had he gone to lie down and fallen asleep? True, when the party came up in conversation, he had not promised to come, but neither had he said that he would not. She had set such high hopes on this evening and now she could scarcely believe that nothing was as she hoped.

Her costume won first prize, a papyrus picture of the Pharaoh Akhenaton. She had been praised and fêted, but her thoughts were still with Andy. It was hot in the salon, and at midnight she went down to the after-deck to get some air. It was dark and empty, but there, behind the lifeboats, she thought she glimpsed a loving couple. Jealous thoughts of others' happiness made her take a closer look. Approaching warily, she saw Farid, the exquisite waiter from the dining-room, in the tender embrace of...no, it couldn't be? Yes, it was. The person holding Farid in his arms was Andy. Only now did she understand why he was not married, why she had waited for him in vain, why he had told his mother: 'No one's going to tell me how to live my life!'

15 Johan

Hanna woke up with a strange feeling. The recent sale of her business made her feel rich, she was independent now and no one was her boss. She was fifty on the day before she registered at the university, and once again she was going to begin a new life. The pain of Marton's death was still there. Occasional attempts at new relationships, her longing for love, had always ended in disappointment. Slowly, slowly she had seen that it was the dead Marton she had been looking for in all the men who crossed her path. Did that mean that she would never again meet someone to whom she could be genuinely attached?

Of course she was the oldest on her course, but her fellow-students did not make her feel it. She was one of them, and she enjoyed student life, the intellectual stimulus. Now that the children had left home, she could feel free to think only of herself, to live the life which had never been hers, the careless young life that had been stolen from her.

The café round the corner was their meeting place. There was always someone there in the evenings, prepared to go on discussing that day's lecture, or the meaning of life. She could not help noticing that Johan was often around. She enjoyed his company too, and they gradually became inseparable. They often rang each other up to discuss an idea, test the validity of a theory, comment on something they had heard in the lecture, or just to say 'hallo'. They trusted each other, they gave each other strength, and a deepening relationship was developing between them.

Johan was twenty years younger than she was, with a confused childhood behind him. He was a survivor, who had had to struggle from the beginning. Beneath his serious exterior there was the playfulness and cheerfulness she so much needed to balance her dark hours. He did not seem to take life very seriously, but at the same time his accurate observations indicated a deep commitment. His brilliant intellect was complemented by attractive looks, and she felt flattered

by the attention of this well set-up young man. The thought of him made her feel happier, it was more fun getting up in the morning. They were only friends, she was too old to think of anything else. True, he most often danced with her when they were out at a disco, but that was not so very significant.

'It's summer soon, what are your plans?' he asked when they met at one of the last lectures of the spring.

'I haven't thought about it much. How about you?'

'Couldn't we go away together?'

'You and me?'

'Yes.'

'What do you mean?'

'I feel I want to be with you. I want to get to know you better, I don't want us to separate now that the courses are over. I want us to spend the summer together.'

'That sounds flattering. But I'm so much older than you are. Why don't you ask Britta?'

'Because I want to go away with you, not Britta.'

'I'm twenty years older.'

'What does that matter? We get on well together.'

'Yes, we do, we are friends.'

'Not only friends. I feel so much more for you. A man and a woman can't be just friends without the sexual side coming up.'

'You don't really mean you're interested in me?'

'Yes, that's what I mean.'

She didn't quite believe him, but the longing was there, and she had no desire to reject this opportunity. The more she thought about him the more she too felt an attraction, and a gap between what was sensible and the feelings that were trying to get out. It was a mistake to get involved in a relationship with a man who was so much younger. It could not last for long. He would soon get tired

of seeing an older woman at his side, and he was sure to leave her for someone young. But still, the thought of experiencing love again, even if it was short-lived, told her that it would be worth the cost. She thought about Marton and how he had fought against their love because she was twenty years younger. Now it was Johan who was twenty years younger and it was her turn to be sensible. But her experience was opposed to rejecting what today might offer. Tomorrow was still an unknown quantity. Brief happiness today did not have to be exchanged for an uncertain future. 'You will see in twenty years' time that I was right,' Marton used to say in his attempts to deter her from marrying him. Twenty years later, of course, he was dead, and she was destroyed by grief, but all the same, he had not been right, it would have been a big mistake not to stay together. Was she to make the same mistake now? She would never have wanted to forego the few years of their marriage. How much richer life is when it alternates between peaks and valleys! A monotonous life was not for her, although she knew that the peaks exacted a high price. As Khalil Gibran says: 'Joy and sorrow come together, and when one sits alone with you at your board, the other is asleep upon your bed.'

★

Summer on the island began very well. The birch trees were out, the weather was in its happiest mood. They woke early and ran down to the sea, competing to be the first in the water. Their laughter echoed among the surprised islets, which over the years had grown used to her despondent tread. Even the silence that followed when they lay side by side on the beach was different. It was a silence which shouted out their happiness, their new-found joy. The pair of swans that lived among the reeds came up to sun themselves in their wordless fellowship. Nothing disturbed them, everything breathed peace. Only the occasional sound of a motor boat in the distance reminded them that there was a world outside their own. They bathed, lay in the sun and ate, and life was complete. But although she did not know it, there was a snake even in this

paradise. The truth could occasionally be glimpsed, but it was not revealed until much later, when she could no longer shut her eyes to it. She, who thought herself so certain of Johan's love, had a rival.

On the first morning when the yellow harbingers of autumn began to mingle with the summer green, Johan went in to town to see if he had passed in theory of science. She had asked him to get the programme for the autumn lectures at the same time and make a note of the course literature. He was going to row over to the mainland, take the bus, and be back by six at latest. But seven and eight o'clock passed, and still he had not come. She sat on the verandah gazing out to sea without seeing a sign of the rowing boat. She waited, unable to understand his lateness, walked restlessly up and down from the verandah to the telephone, from the telephone to the verandah. The telephone remained silent. Her calls to the flat in town echoed emptily. No reply. She was seized with anxiety: could an accident have happened? At midnight, when she knew he was not on the last bus either, she went in and sat by the telephone. She got out the telephone directory and rang round to all the hospitals in town, but he was not in any of the casualty departments. She telephoned the police. They had not brought in anyone of his name. She became hysterical and the case-hardened policeman tried to calm her down.

'Go off to bed. He will be out enjoying himself.'

Out enjoying himself. Johan. Without her. No, that was not possible, any more than she could imagine going out without him. Their love needed nobody else. They were sufficient for each other, they had the same thoughts, the same dreams, the same soul. Something must have happened to him. Perhaps he had been attacked or kidnapped, perhaps he was lying helpless and bleeding somewhere on a wooded hillside. She felt strongly that he must be in some trouble, and fear stuck like a lump in her throat. She saw his pleading face before her, and if the boat had been there she would have rowed to the mainland to look for him.

Dawn found her still sitting on the verandah. She shivered in the cool air, but could not get up to fetch a wrap.

It was too early to ring up friends in town. Something unexpected might have held him back and prevented him from telephoning. In that case one of them would know about it. The hands of the grandfather clock moved like snails and it took an eternity before the long hand caught up with the short one and she saw them meet at last at eight. Only then did she dare to ring up her friends, but none of them knew anything. In her desperation she telephoned Lasse, a fellow student with whom they had only occasional contacts. It turned out that he had seen Johan at about one o'clock in front of the college noticeboard.

'He looked upset, his name was not on the list of people who had passed science theory,' said Lasse.

'Did you speak to him?'

'No, but he muttered something to that effect.'

'Do you know what he was going to do next?'

'No, we went our separate ways.'

That was all she could discover.

The morning crept by unbelievably slowly. She tried to busy herself with other things while anxiety gnawed at her. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the telephone finally rang. Johan's voice:

'Hallo, it's me.'

'What are you doing, what's happened, where are you, why didn't you come back yesterday on the five o'clock bus like you said?'

'I couldn't.'

'What do you mean?'

'I hadn't passed the test and I couldn't come home.'

'What did you do all night?'

'Wandered round the town, and then I had to go to bed. But I'm on my way now. I'll take the five o'clock bus.'

'How could you leave me waiting and not ring up? You knew I would be worried when you didn't come. I haven't slept a wink, I thought you were dead.'

'A bad penny always turns up. See you soon.'

She let out her breath, but at the same time found it hard to understand why he had not come to her with his disappointment over the failed exam, that he preferred to stay alone in town.

Johan arrived on the five o'clock bus, twenty-four hours later than he should have. He arrived full of remorse, with a big box of chocolates and a bottle of whisky which they were to drink to his forgiveness. She accepted his plea, still without understanding what had kept him in town. Until a few more days had passed, and his interest in alcohol was becoming more and more obvious. But they were about to move back to town, and she wanted to avoid the truth. The last days of their summer holiday must not be ruined by quarrelling.

In the year that followed, life's roller coaster travelled by turns high up among the clouds, entangled in the magic web of love, and down to hell, where only cold remnants remained. Quarrels were followed by reconciliation, reconciliation by more quarrels. She believed him every time he assured her that he really was going to stop now, but, like so many other women before her, she simply found further confirmation that alcohol was stronger than love.

The autumn term had passed and the spring term was drawing to an end. Johan had stayed away from lectures for several days and she was worried about him. Today she was going to his rooms, even though the last time they met she had said she never wanted to see him again.

She rang the doorbell, but there was no answer. She got out her key[̄] and took a step backwards when she opened the door to the unaired room. The once tidy, comfortable flat looked like the destruction of Jerusalem. Stacks of bottles, beer cans, papers, clothes helter-skelter, cigarette stubs in all possible and impossible places, dirty dishes and burned saucepans. So bewildered was she that had she not seen Johan lying on the sofa she would have thought she had come to the wrong place.

'How are you?' she asked.

'How did you get in? Did the police let you in?'

'What d'you mean?'

'I know they're standing outside waiting, they want to lock me up, they're just waiting for me to leave the room.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Can't you hear them shouting through the door? Come out, come out, we're waiting for you!'

'Nobody is shouting, I can't hear anything. Are you dreaming?'

'No, I'm not dreaming. I was on my way to the liquor shop when I discovered that they were after me. But I tricked them, I didn't go in, I went to the subway instead. I took the train to Central and changed trains, but they were following me all the time. They sat round me, threatening me, shouting that I'd better take care.'

'You must be ill, you're imagining things.'

'No, you must believe me. Quiet, listen, can't you hear them?'

'No. I can't hear anything. Can't we go out together, then you'll see there is no one there?'

'I don't dare.'

'Johan, you're ill, come on, we'll go to hospital, you must have help.'

It was not easy to persuade Johan, it took time, but in the end he agreed to go with her to the hospital.

A long stay in hospital followed, and his promise of never-again. When he had realized what had happened he had been really frightened, and obeyed the doctor's orders without protest. For some time after his discharge there were no problems about making him take his pills, but after a while the temptation became too strong again. It was only then that she understood the power of her rival, and that the uneven struggle was quite hopeless.

16 Tibet - The Silk Road

Life flowed on at a leisurely pace. The children had become teenagers, and she had difficulty in being both father and mother, in combining strictness and gentleness. The revolt against 'paternal authority' so important to teenagers had turned against her, her standards and rules had been called in question more and more each day. The children defied her, tested her limits. She was afraid of the big responsibility, of the difficulty of protecting them on her own against the dangers in society. She was afraid they would turn out badly if she did not hold them on a tight rein. She did not dare to be tender, did not dare to reveal the understanding she actually felt for youth, and this resulted in constant conflicts. It would have been easier if there had been two of them to bring the children up, one who was decisive and one who softened the decisions.

A good many years had passed since Marton's death, but her loss still hurt her every time she was reminded of him. His memory had become both her weakness and her strength. At difficult times she had been able to turn to him in her thoughts, ask his advice, get answers to her problems.

Travel was her flight from reality, from loss, from herself. Now she was on her way to India, and to Tibet. Dreams from far back in time were to be fulfilled. From a time when the future was still unknown, when India was represented by Kipling, and Tibet was still only the exotic images in Sven Hedin's books.

Her goal was approaching when she looked at her watch and realized from the broad, winding, glittering yellow ribbon below the aircraft that they were flying over the Ganges, the sacred river. Suddenly she remembered the poem by the Hungarian poet Ady they had read at school. She had scarcely dared to hope then that she would one day stand face to face with this image. She still remembered it by heart:

Seated on the banks of the Ganges
 dreaming of a southern clime
 my soul as a bellflower changes
 a silent quivering force is mine.

Every time she was nearing a country she had dreamed of for a long time, she had experienced mixed feelings. Happiness, combined with a prick of fear that everything would still be a dream. In order to bear the earlier harsh reality she had so often lived in dreams that now, when reality had become easier again, she scarcely dared to believe it. She scarcely dared to believe that the stories she had read as a teenager, the dreams of lands the poets had sung, had come to life, that all this was before her eyes, to be discovered and experienced.

Closer contact with the Ganges and its surroundings in the days that followed changed her slowly. The poem now appeared in a different light, poetry had given way to the reality. The heavy, dirty yellow masses of water flowed majestically in their broad bed, oblivious of the seething mass of people who bathed, washed their clothes, brushed their teeth and burned their dead side by side. The Ganges knows it is sacred, and nothing can affect its serenity. In the light of the setting sun she peered at the little boys in the nearby boats, selling yellow wreaths of flowers to the supplicants. She meditated on the waves which freely carried away the flower lanterns weighed down with the prayers of devotees, as they had done since the beginning of time. Washing clothes, burning the dead, all this is part of life, today, in past and future days, and the smoothly flowing Ganges ensures that it all continues to exist. The river is indifferent to who sits on its strand, whether it is herself today, or the poet of a hundred years ago, or a thousand. The yellow body of Ganges water streams by without interruption, the image remains unaltered for eternity, just like the human prayers and dreams in the sacred petals.

The beautiful weather lasted throughout the flight, white cumulus clouds spreading out beneath the aircraft. The 'Fasten Seatbelts' notice lit up, and it was not until the descent began that they met the grey clouds which stretched above Lhasa. After a short approach the aircraft landed with a jolt, and soon afterwards they were allowed to disembark. She picked up her jacket and hand baggage and walked towards the exit. Out on the landing steps she was struck

by a blinding headache, as if someone had hit her. She looked up: it was not the sky that had fallen upon her, it seemed to have lost itself somewhere far off in the greyness. She began to grasp that it was the altitude that was taking its toll. What did the guide book say? 'Two thousand metres above sea level, may cause headache, nausea, in severe cases pulmonary oedema.'

After a few days her head felt easier and she was on her way to the little monastery on the mountainside, where with luck she would be meeting the lama she had heard so much about. Accompanied by Lobsang, her Tibetan guide, she rode on a small mountain horse. The horses carried their riders safely along the narrow path where one false step could plunge them into the abyss. She was a little frightened, while at the same time her belief that everything is written gave her courage. 'Don't look to the side, let the horse look after you,' her friends had said when they were telling her about the wise man in the mountains.

After the steep climb they reached a plateau and she breathed more easily. She dismounted, picked up a pebble from the path and, as instructed by Lobsang, laid it on the obin, a cairn by the roadside. This was the traveller's thanks for safe arrival at the peak, and a prayer for continued fortune on the journey. From the distance she heard the fragile sound of a bell which mingled with the clatter of hooves. The pale blue sky was very far away and the horizon stretched towards infinity. An almost motionless eagle hovered above her head and at the roadside prayer flags fluttered. 'Guardian spirits,' she thought, climbing back into the saddle. As they went on the surrounding peaks drew closer, making her feel that she had only to stretch out a hand to touch the little monastery, the swallow's nest stuck on the mountain wall.

Two Tibetan girls, with the bright red cheeks characteristic of that altitude, approached from another path. They were carrying baskets on their backs, filled with yellow flowers. They were going up to the monastery to make their offerings and at the same time to leave food for a meditating hermit in a cave

on the way. The yellow wreaths, the red cheeks and the girls' dark clothes stood out in startling contrast to the blue sky.

As they rose higher they lost sight of the monastery, but the prayer wheels on the roadside showed her that they had not far to go. The girls set the wheels in motion clockwise and encouraged her to do the same. This would make the prayer rise up to heaven: the more often the wheel turns, the more prayers rise up. Each turn is a plus on the great account, giving the mover a chance of rebirth into a life more comfortable than the present one.

They led their horses the last part of the way, and when they rounded the final cliff the tapering white monastery with its black windows was revealed once again, reaching towards the clouds as if in prayer. The roof glittered in the sunshine, and the golden roe deer, Buddha's disciples, seemed to be leaping out into the blue. They walked through the dark archway, tied up the horses in the yard, and went on to a smaller building close to the monastery. They passed along a corridor and Lobsang opened the door to the room where the lama lived. He was a man in his sixties, of middle height, and muscular. The rust-coloured monk's robe, which left his right arm bare, was almost the same colour as his skin, and only the warmly glowing eyes shone out. He was sitting in a narrow cell with an earth floor, where all his possessions, both those that were part of Buddhism and those that ensured his survival, lay clustered about him.

In front, on a little hand-carved stool, stood a statue of the Buddha, a prayer wheel, a thunderbolt, a watch and an oblong prayer book packet wrapped in a dirty yellow cloth. In the right-hand corner of the cell was a primitive fireplace, with a sooty watercan, a ladle, a strainer, a mug and a Thermos jug. Nailed to the wall was an old, well-thumbed little amateur photo of the Dalai Lama. The little window in one of the short sides left the room in semi-darkness, and the soft chiming of the bells reinforced the silence in the meagre cell. She felt a sense of calm and well-being. What if she were to stay here? To have peace to think. To escape going back to the roar

of the city, the hectic life, with all its problems, be able to sink into herself and begin at last to look for a purpose. Would she be able to renounce everything at home? Leave the children, leave the comfortable life to which she had become accustomed, live under primitive conditions? She did not really know, but it was very tempting.

'You are seeking yourself,' said the lama in broken English.

'Yes. May I stay?'

'The answer is inside you.'

'I want help.'

'Where have you found it up to now?'

'With those who loved me and are no longer alive.'

'That help will always be there for you. Continue to turn to them.'

'Can one forgive those who murdered the people one loved?'

'What has happened cannot be undone. If you hate, you injure yourself, you cherish bad thoughts and they breed. You must send out good vibrations if the world is to be a better place.'

'I don't hate. I can forgive those who have done me wrong, but I can never forgive the evil they did to my parents.'

'If you do not forgive, the world cannot go forward. You must feel compassion for your enemies. Your enemies are your teachers. They teach you patience and endurance, they give you inner strength.'

'To forgive the murderers I have to understand them. How can one understand the evil that is responsible for the murder of so many millions of innocent people? If I understand what happened, I accept that it can happen again. No, I don't think I can forgive on behalf of the dead. They themselves must be the judges. Nor do I think you can forgive the Chinese who murdered your parents.'

'Life consists of suffering, and you must learn to free yourself from the causes of suffering.'

'Teach me.'

'I am tired. Come back in the morning.'

She was allowed to spend the night in the building outside the monastery, in order to receive the promised lesson in Buddhism the next day. The night did not bring her much sleep, her thoughts wrestled in her aching head, and when dawn showed itself behind the mountain tops she got up and dressed. She waited impatiently to meet the lama again and when the time came, went expectantly to his cell. As on the day before, he was sitting on the mat in front of his stool, bowed over his books, his arms hidden in his Buddhist robe. He raised his head, gave her a friendly nod of recognition and waited in silence for her questions. After a time he began to speak, instructing her in the mysteries of Buddhism. The lama explained the Buddhist system, spoke of the four noble truths, of the various steps on the eightfold path, of spiritual development, love and compassion. He took his time and the audience went on for several hours. When at last she rose to go, she had also received a brief insight into meditation, and instruction on the way to achieve freedom. Would she succeed?

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Four women in a jeep. Women of the same age, travellers brought together by the same interest: Sven Hedin's voyages of discovery. They were to follow his route through Takla Makan, the desert in south-west China which stretches between Pakistan, Russia and Tibet. The southern route was not open to tourists, but their guide had succeeded in negotiating permission and now they had started the journey from Kashgar to Yarkand. Her mornings were still being upset by the time changes. She, who was used to waking up about six, now scarcely heard the alarm clock when it was set for nine-thirty. She was tired, in a bad mood and could not understand why her usual enthusiasm, always present when she was travelling, was not with her.

Vera, the biologist from Umeå^Q, sat silently beside her, while Kerstin, the social worker from Gotland, kept on talking. The sun came scorching through

the lowered windows of the vehicle and she was annoyed with herself for not having taken the seat next to the driver, which at that time was in shade. She was sweating in the white overalls and sunhat she had put on to protect her from the searing rays. She sighed, took out her water bottle and thought crossly about the fact that was annoying her even more than the heat. Stina, their guide, in no way corresponded to her expectations. Stina was a masculine, well-muscled woman, determined and obdurate, more interested in achievements than experiences. Her goal was to overcome difficulties, travel to unknown areas and visit exotic countries. The things she was interested in were quite outside Stina's competence. If she wanted to know anything the question had to be passed on to the Chinese-speaking driver, Jahab, an Uigur. Jahab was a very good driver and knew the area well, but he did not know much about Buddhist monuments, or geological formations either. It did not bode well.

Her inner image of the desert consisted of miles of sand dunes. But even by the third day of their departure from Kashgar this image had not been confirmed. They drove along a desolate road, which cut through a grey, rocky landscape with no signs of life. The jeep travelled kilometre after kilometre without meeting any traffic. Suddenly, as if in a mirage, a bunch of flowers reached towards her. She rubbed her eyes, and as the jeep moved on she saw bushes with pink flower clusters swaying in the wind. On both sides of the road the spring-flowering tamarisk countered her assumption that nothing grew in the desert. On and on they drove, without seeing any other trucks. Only once or twice was the empty horizon broken by a donkey cart,^{on} which the outlines of an Uigur farmer slowly developed. Immobile, with his little cap on his head and a long whip in his hand, his eyes followed the jeep, that unusual intruder into his world. After several hours they at last saw a petrol-driven truck rise up out of nowhere. It was a crowded bus, a sardine tin with a mass of people sitting on each others' knees, or on the roof, with countless heads poking through the open windows, and clusters hanging from the doorways.

Towards evening the brush thickened and was joined by grass-like plants. The green spread further and further. They were nearing an oasis, Yarkand, where they would spend the night. Yarkand was a town that did not seem to have changed since the days of Marco Polo. Narrow streets led off poplar avenues with irrigation channels, small, clay houses, a tumbledown mosque. The people they met wore their traditional headdresses. Men in colourful trousers, women with brown, transparent cloths over their heads and faces, peeped curiously. They had probably never seen Europeans before. Apart from Sven Hedin, not many had wandered here, to this long-forbidden area. They had difficulty in communicating with the inhabitants, sign language did not go far. The Uigurs, who spoke a Turkic dialect, could not even speak Chinese. But the visitors were soon to be given proof of the eastern hospitality they had heard so much about.

Exhausted and hot after the long drive, their spirits were gradually raised by the breeze from the fan in the shabby guesthouse and the water for tea in the obligatory Chinese thermos flask. They could fetch water in a bowl from a tap in the yard and after a scanty wash the three women were ready to get better acquainted with the town.

They were staying in the modern quarter, consisting of one broad street fringed with poplar avenues and irrigation channels. Little 'boutiques' along the channels, no more than holes in the wall, sold clothes, knick-knacks, and 'mahorka', dried poplar leaves, which they rolled skilfully in newspaper and smoked instead of cigarettes. It was clean, but everything was covered with a fine, powdery dust which made its way into every nook and cranny. When she swallowed she could feel the dry taste on her tongue. As they left the centre of town the road narrowed and soon the poplars with their feet in the channel were standing guard over earth-brown walls and tumbledown clay huts. Very few Chinese lived in Yarkand and all the people they met were Uigurs, who stopped whatever they were doing to straighten up and stare in amazement at the

small group. Vera, Kerstin and she herself were soon beckoned by an Uigur family into their home in one of the small clay houses with an entrance directly on the street.

They climbed down into a dark, cellar-like room without windows. It was both dark and dirty, poverty cried out from the walls. The floor consisted of trodden clay and the room was completely empty of furniture, apart from a raised platform running the length of the wall. The father of the house pointed to what seemed to be the bed and signed to them to sit down. It turned out that the platform was both seat, bed and table.

After a little hesitation they took off their shoes and climbed up on to the mat that covered the 'bed-table'. The children gazed wide-eyed at their guests while the woman went over to the fireplace in the corner. The eldest boy was sent to the adjoining storeroom and came out with a large water melon, which grandfather quickly cut up. Then the mother brought tea and a loaf of bread, which were offered freely. The poverty was so obvious that they did not want to accept the food, but after stubborn coaxing, all three tasted the melon. An attempt at conversation began and they were surprised at how little language is really needed in order for people to communicate with each other. She recognized individual words from other European languages, the father knew a few English words, and the rest proceeded with the help of sign language. They parted on cordial terms and she took down their address so that she could send them the photographs they had taken.

The relationship with Stina was not as cordial. Back in the room an indignant guide awaited them. According to the unspoken rules they were to stay together even in the evenings, and she found this difficult to respect. No one in the group was to question Stina's word in any way, they must follow her unquestioningly through fire and water, they were all devoted disciples. Only Vera and she herself had not travelled with Stina before and had difficulty in adapting. Both wanted to keep free the hours they had believed to be free, and this gave rise to many irritations.

They looked forward expectantly to the high point of the journey: the camel ride to the ghost town. At last they would be penetrating the real desert, joining a camel caravan, experiencing the nomad life. The ghost town was forbidden to tourists, but Stina's special standing would apply even here. To everyone's great disappointment, it turned out that the Chinese had withdrawn permission without prior warning, and no camels awaited them at the edge of the sandy desert. Refusing to accept the decision, Stina insisted on taking them into the desert: if there were no camels, they would go on by jeep. After lengthy negotiations and threats the Chinese agreed, on condition that they drove no further than a hundred kilometres. She could see no point in a jeep ride through the sand, and protested, but Stina did not listen and gave the order to start.

The four trucks set off, driving in among the sand dunes, where only a few tamarisks could be seen along the dried-up river bed. The heat in the open jeep was insufferable, any hope that the movement of the car would produce a little breeze soon crushed: their slow progress did not stir the slightest puff of wind. The broiling sun, more like a red-hot brick, struck her almost senseless. The white overalls stuck to her chest and thighs and she twisted and turned, trying to find a way of sitting which would cause her less discomfort. The three women sat gasping, each in her corner of the jeep, drinking thirstily from their water bottles, now also heated by the sun. The driver wiped his forehead with a dirty handkerchief and signalled that he too wanted water. She handed him her bottle and waited for him to give it back, but he showed no intention of doing so. She let it pass, thinking that Stina must have an extra bottle. She did not know then that Stina's motto was 'Every man for himself'!

But then the column stopped: the front car was stuck in the sand. Everyone climbed out and stood watching the skidding wheels. It was just like being at home in Sweden when the worst of the snow closed in. But here it was summer, and none of the drivers knew what to do. Stina resolutely ordered the

helpless men to fetch some branches which could be seen in the distance, and loudly instructed the Uigurs on how to move cars that have stuck fast. The process was successful, but their rejoicing was short-lived. Only a few minutes later, the next car stuck. This time it was more difficult to break free, and she searched feverishly for a bush, a little shade in which to escape the deadly rays. The pocket thermometer she carried stood at 50 degrees in the sun; when she finally found a little shade it sank to a 'comfortable' 35 degrees. The fine sand blew around, finding its way stealthily into the tiniest crevice. She could feel sand under her clothes, in her ears and nose, on her tongue and between her teeth. She was very thirsty and went to Stina to ask for water.

'You should not have given the driver your bottle,' Stina replied.

'How can you refuse a thirsty man?' she asked.

'You should have poured a little into a cup.'

The attempts to penetrate the desert seemed pointless and she wanted to persuade Stina to turn back. 'On my trips I make the decisions,' said Stina, when she suggested they return. They would go further into the desert, where they might meet camels or some of the desert people, said Stina, who had no intention of forgoing the exotic experiences she had planned to offer her travellers. It was not until late in the afternoon, after the cars had got stuck time and time again, that she gave in and ordered the column to turn back to the oasis they had passed an hour before.

Everyone felt relieved. The drive back also took a long time, but then at last she was able to quench her thirst and get down to pitching her tent. Heat, thirst, the sharp words and the hard work aroused feelings of distaste that she could not quite place. Where and when had she experienced something like this before?

The next day they were supposed to take a walk in the desert. They went in a group, all chatting, and she was irritated by the sounds around her. She wanted to be alone but did not dare to leave the group. The sand dunes everywhere looked alike, their uniformity broken only by the skeleton of an animal, or a stunted

tamarisk. If the wind began to blow they too would disappear and she was certain she would not find her way back to the tent. But she wanted to listen to the silence, so she slowed her pace until she was far enough away from the noisy conversation. When they sat down to rest she was no longer afraid of getting lost and distanced herself still more. A faint whistling sound mingled with her own heartbeat, while she listened intently to what sounded like footsteps in the sand. She turned, but there was nothing to be seen, neither animal nor human. She was alone for as far as she could see. She sat down on the next hillock and let the horizon embrace her, awakening in her once again the feeling of belonging, of being one with her surroundings. Belonging to nature, to the people they met, the boy with the toothless grin, the little dark girl washing herself in the cracked hand basin, the thousand year-old woman feeding her grandchildren, they were all with her now, around her, inside her. She picked up a few pebbles which Marco Polo could have walked on and experienced a strong feeling of the vanity of life, the blink of the centuries. Who is she, sitting here? Where does she end, where does everything else begin? Only the heat is real and she is its vibration.

Next day the journey continued.

'How is it that our car didn't follow the lead car?' asked Kerstin, when the jeep stopped at the next oasis to wait for the leading car.

She did not have the will to answer, although she knew the reason. It was obvious that the lead car had got lost in the rugged terrain. It stopped, turned, stopped. Jahab stopped as well, and when they met a donkey cart he asked the way and turned the jeep.

Kerstin was one of those who never doubted the leader: without questioning, she would blindly follow him through thick and thin. She was probably also one of those who, given a choice between the map and the road, would always follow the map, regardless of whether it was right or not.

They soon left the sandy desert behind them and the cars drove, mile after mile, through a grey and rocky landscape without a trace of anything living. The drivers had problems with the route. All at once the column stopped for discussion, after which they changed direction.

'Umschaltung,' was Karin's comment.

What did she say? she thought. The German word became distorted in her ears: it sounded like 'Umschlagplatz'. Umschlagplatz? The place where Jews were transferred into cattle trucks for further transport to Auschwitz? Why had she made that association?

The lunch they had brought with them, dried meat, fish, fruit, milk cubes, biscuits and hard-boiled eggs, was distributed. They sat on rocks to eat, but had little appetite in that heat. She refused the dried meat, drank a litre of water, ate an egg and did not touch the rest. When the meal was over Kerstin packed up the remaining bags.

'You never know. What if we get hungry and have nothing to eat!'

Something like a *déjà vu*. Where had she heard those words before? On arrival in Sweden. Starving, emaciated girls, who dared not believe there would be food tomorrow, as well. Sandwiches kept in pockets, bits of meat stuffed under pillows.

They had been travelling by jeep for a whole week when Stina offered the welcome news that they were going on a camel ride. The Chinese promised to make camels available so that they could experience how it felt to travel all day long by an age-old means of conveyance. This surprising about-turn astonished them. Could there have been some secret plans which caused the earlier refusal?

The camels were waiting at the edge of the sand dunes. The tethered animals sat patiently staring ahead with their large eyes. She examined the indifferent creatures and selected one which seemed to look curiously at her, sat in the saddle and waved her uncertainty aside while the camel driver made the animal get up.

As she rose into the air she turned giddy and when the camel swayed off the feeling was extraordinary. However, she soon fell into the camel's rhythm, allowing herself to be carried along without tensing her muscles, even managing to extract her camera and photograph the surrounding dunes and fugitive patterns in the sand.

The caravan moved slowly forward and for once everyone was quiet. The lead camel's bell tinkled softly and the camel driver's low-voiced, melancholy song made her forget the hard saddle she was sitting on. Another caravan appeared behind a sand dune - could it be Sven Hedin? No, it was only the other half of their group, which had progressed so much further. She was sweating in the bright sunshine and remembered the warning: 'Drink often and plenty, even if you are not thirsty.' Although the saddle was covered with a soft rug it was pinching more and more, and she altered her posture, sitting with both legs on the same side. At first it wasn't easy to stay in the saddle in this position, but she soon got used to it and sat firm, even when the camel began to stride out.

Stina ordered a halt and they stopped at an oasis with orders for a 'pee break'. By that time she was used to Stina's military manner and knew there was no consideration for individual needs, that everyone had to accept the 'pee break', no matter what they themselves wanted. The same applied to photography, permitted only during the 'photo break'. She took out her camera and went for a walk beside the water.

The camel drivers loosened the ropes and made the animals lie down in the shade. Assia, her camel, proved to be a self-assured individual with a will of his own and instead of lying down he stood under a tamarisk and chewed at the branches. The camel driver's harsh attempts to make him rest were unsuccessful. She took some photographs and then followed the camels when they were led to the edge of the water. The animals leaned down to drink, but Assia stood aside, refusing to follow the others' example. The camel driver hit him, but Assia

resisted. The driver calmly raised his whip and struck again, becoming increasingly furious when the animal obviously had no intention of obeying. The camel shrieked, but did not give in. She found it painful to watch, the blows felt as if they were striking her own back, and she tried to interfere. It was quite a time before the cruel camel driver let his victim go. She was informed that it was his right to strike. Might is right.

When evening came she was sore in every limb and glad that the ride was over. With all due deference to camel caravans, twentieth century transport was still preferable.

Next day they took to the jeeps again. As they continued their journey the bleak landscape changed day by day. Sometimes they drove on an asphalt road, through a tunnel of poplars bowing towards one another; sometimes across a trackless terrain, where grey dust covered the meagre branches. Another time it might be along dried-up riverbeds among sprouting vegetation, or perhaps in a bleak landscape where the mountains changed colour from grey to red to black.

They came to a pass where they were to pitch their tents for the night. The day had been very hot and the mildness of sundown felt pleasant. They ate their evening meal round the campfire and crawled wearily into their sleeping bags.

A few hours later she woke up, shivering with cold in her training overalls. She looked round the tent to see if there were anything more she could put on. Her eyes met only the big empty cloth bag and the bottle of hot tea which she fetched every evening from the 'field kitchen'. She pushed the bottle down into the sleeping bag and tried to creep into the cloth bag. Another layer inside the sleeping bag might give her a little more warmth. But the cold was intolerable. She lay curled up, teeth chattering, and tried to do 'marching on the spot' where she lay. Nothing helped. The cold would not give way. She remembered some rugs in the jeep and decided to fetch one. With shaking fingers she opened the zip fastener on the tent and was almost dazzled by the brilliant moonlight illuminating the cold night. Despite the cold she could not help being

enchanted by the ghostly shadows etched against the surrounding mountains. After the quivering heat of the day, this lifeless frozen landscape was quite unreal, as if under a magic spell. Behind the shadows she expected to find a fairy with a magic wand, hoping to witness the moment when life was charmed back again. But before this she had to stretch out her hand to bring in her ~~sk~~ boots, stiff with cold and difficult to put on. When she reached the car it turned out to be locked, and there was no fairy around to wave a magic wand. She could only return to her tent and shiver through the rest of the night. Was this a holiday? It reminded her more of that long-ago time that she did not really want to think about, when there were no fairies around either.

In the morning the thermometer stood at minus two degrees. The rising sun was glowing blood-red when she left her sleeping-bag to move about and get warm at last. When, after some time, she came running back, she had to hurry to strike her tent and gulp down the steaming tea before the jeep set off on the next stage.

A few hours later the troubles of the night were forgotten, the sun was baking and everyone was longing for a little of the night's chill. When they suddenly glimpsed spots of white in the distance they thought that their prayer had been answered: God had sent snow to the desert. But what they were witnessing was no miracle, the heat did not relent one jot, what had deceived them was only white salt crystals precipitated by the heat.

They arrived at a little place consisting of clay hovels, where only the rickety TV aerials revealed that they were no longer living in the days of Marco Polo. Everything else she could recognize from his travel diaries: the high clay walls surrounding the houses, the water channels with poplars outside the walls, the vines inside, the smith shoeing the donkeys, the boys producing spaghetti. Here too the universal thin, white dust covered man and beast, and only the little black eyes shone from the faces of the naked, sun-browned children. Everywhere people were working - men, women and children, busy with their tasks, children prematurely robbed of their childhood had been put to work. What kind

of happiness had they? Nature is harsh, they must pay a high price for survival. Every day they have to take up the power struggle - surely human beings could not have been intended to live in this harsh climate. And yet they do live here. They have challenged God. They have decided to make their home just here, in defiance of the impossible. With every day they give proof of their strength, of the toughness, obstinacy and endurance of human beings. They have built irrigation channels which give them food, they endure the heat of the day and the cold of the night. What is it that sustains them? The challenge itself?

17 Age

She woke up slowly in her bed in the country and lay with closed eyes, searching for what it was she should be remembering. It was quite a time before the fact that it was her birthday rose up through her consciousness. Seventy-two today. She had never dared to believe that she would grow so old. So much had happened to her over the years, cruelty, accidents, dangers and disappointments, all those times when she had prayed for death, all the times when she had been glad to escape it. On this day she was seventy-two. In her mind she reversed the figures twenty-seven - no, not twenty-seven. Never again twenty-seven. Seventy-two eventful years have passed - and now there are not so many left.

She thought of her grandchildren, so different from the child she had been. They had been brought up much more informally, their wishes had been respected, their parents had accepted their defiance for what it was, without being provoked. They were both more childish and more grown-up than she had been at their age. They knew so much more, the television had given them a general education which would have been quite unfamiliar to her generation. At the same time their freedom of movement had been more restricted, they had been more sheltered, and as a result were less daring. They were content to be children, they did not want to grow up, as she had in her childhood. They could still play, late into their teens, whereas she had been obliged to shoulder an adult role at an early age. Was it because she had been deprived of her youth that she still wanted to play? It sounded almost indecent, an old person still thinking about playing games.

In her inmost heart she did not feel old. She still felt young, curious and happy. The thought of death left her unmoved. Just now she did want to live a little longer, it would be fun to attend her grandchildren's marriages, but she was prepared to meet death at any moment. Better now, while she was well, so that she escaped feeling her strength ebb away. The only thing she was

afraid of was becoming a burden to the children, losing the use of her mind, turning into a parcel. She had never been able to understand Marguerite Yourcenar, who wanted to die with her eyes open. To be there as she became extinct, to experience every change as she died, was not something she was curious about. She did not want to know how it happened. The only thing she had wanted, since she was a teenager, was to fall asleep, like Soames in the Forsyte Saga. At a great age, under a shady tree, surrounded by grandchildren. It was this hope that had helped to keep her youthful fear of death at bay. At that time she had been very much afraid of death, but death's terrors had gone through many variations in her lifetime.

In the time she had spent in the camps, where death was a daily guest, fear had been completely absent. Many times she would have welcomed death as a good friend. She eagerly awaited the Allied bombing raids, and as soon as the air raid siren sounded, went to the window and followed the flight of the deadly birds in the hope that their gift was meant for her. But that had not been so, she had survived, and with life the old fear had returned. Death had become an enemy. Some years later, when she was pregnant, it disappeared again. When she was bearing a small life in the making, a promise of continuation, everything had been bright and vibrant. Everything around her breathed hope, and her happiness was so intense that it seemed quite impossible for anything to touch it. A miracle had happened, a growing life filled up her inner being, both body and soul, and nothing else had any place there. Death was no longer threatening. Of course she knew it was there in the background - but it was of no concern. She was expecting her child, which would carry on the family line, and the fear of death had vanished, although according to the laws of logic that was just when it should have grown stronger.

Later on, when she was to have an operation for gallstones, the enemy had manifested itself once again. Knowing that the children needed her aroused fear. It lasted only a short time, and was replaced on Marton's death by a great

longing for death, which culminated on the first anniversary of his death. After that it had gone. Since that time the reaper had become a friend, who bided his time. He might come or delay, it no longer bothered her. Of course there was still much that she hoped to do, but the thought of not getting it done gave life an extra dimension, a delight in still having her strength. Would it be just as desirable to live, if there were no death? The open sea is not as beautiful as a lake, whose shore can be seen on the horizon.

She lay there for a while, thinking of earlier birthdays, pleasant and less pleasant. Of course, she had had a long and eventful life. Many an earthquake had shaken it, many sorrows had darkened it, and yet all the time she had emerged from the darkness. Who had carried the lamp that shone for her, whence came the ray of light which had helped her find the way? So that today, after everything that had happened, she could still be content with her life? What was it that had enabled her to come through the past more successfully than Edit, or others who had shared her fate?

She looked back at her life and the first thing she encountered was the love with which her parents had surrounded her in her earliest years, which had laid the foundations for her confidence, for the ability to love, which had not left her despite all the cruelties, sorrows and disappointments.

She had been lucky. Very lucky. Lucky in her parents, lucky to have been or not been in a particular place at a particular moment - the difference between life and death. Lucky in the years after the war, when she had worked so hard to adapt to life in Sweden, and lucky to meet Marton.

She heard her own voice: 'Worked hard', and had to admit that luck had been helped on by her hard work. Decisiveness, obstinacy, the fruit of both inherited qualities and of a loving milieu, a strong psyche, further strengthened by the people who surrounded her as a child.

It was thanks to her mother's letters, found in Chicago after her aunt's death, that she understood much of this. Throughout her upbringing she had believed

herself to be a foundling, an unloved stepchild, and it was not until she had read that letter that the truth had become clear to her. Her mother's letters to her sister told of a happy marriage and the longing for children, of grief over the still-born first child and great happiness over another pregnancy. There was the letter where her mother spoke of the unborn child and a letter to the new-born Hanna. All those letters which breathed so much love, so much care, had revealed her strict mother's inmost being and made her appear in a completely new light. Afterwards she could not understand how she had ever been able to accuse this mother of lovelessness.

It was her mother, father, and later on Marton who provided her with the inner armour which shielded her from all the poisoned darts. It had not been able to shield her from pain, but certainly from poison.

She was nineteen years old when the storm broke over her head, old enough to deal with the separation from her parents, but not too old for a teenager's romantic belief in life. She had been able to look at reality without closing her eyes, and had known what was happening. She had not deceived herself, like so many others. She had faced reality, and that was how, at the very moment when she was parted from her^{mother}, she knew that her mother was going to her death. She had accepted the inevitable, wept and grieved there and then, thus escaping the painful, elusive hope that many even today were still cherishing: 'Perhaps my mother has survived after all, perhaps I shall see her again one fine day.'

It was not a long step from the thought of her mother to the thought of Marton. The meeting with Marton and his unconditional love had been the most important building bricks in her life. She was convinced that she would never have been able to experience real love without meeting him. Their meeting was preordained, as in the old folk tale:

When God created man he turned on his wheel a long row of jugs, which he then flung down on the earth. When they fell they broke in fragments, and the fragments rolled off in different directions. The half-jugs became men and women,

one half man, the other half woman. When these men and women stood up they felt incomplete and each began to seek the other half. It is only the two halves belonging to the original pot that fit together, and that is why human beings have to search so long before finding their real other half. Many never find it. How was it that she had been privileged to do so?

She got out her old diary. It was her custom to turn to her diary at all times, with both joys and sorrows. The diary, which over the years had become her mother confessor, had always given her the answer she was seeking. It had helped her to understand the pieces of the jigsaw which over the years had made her the woman she now was. Still there was something that did not fit, one piece that was still missing. Why was there this difficulty in seeing herself and the young girl in the camp as the same person? Why was there this split between 'she' and 'I'?

The years passed, and her biological clock was ticking faster and faster. In her heart of hearts she did not feel old, but one look in the glass revealed the truth. In that face which, not so long ago, had been young there were now deepening wrinkles, the eyes had begun to lose their sparkle, and the hair was lit with silver which had mingled unnoticed with the nut-brown threads. Her life flowed calmly, the big waves had subsided, and today she was seventy-two years old.

But of course she had to admit that the youthful vitality had gone, she tired much sooner nowadays. If she were truthful, she knew her body felt the years: it was not nearly as easy to do all the things which had once been so much a matter of course.

She got up, opened the window and put on the water for tea. She rinsed the teapot, went to the tin to get the tea that she used for breakfast, and stopped in the middle of a movement. Everything had become routine. Suddenly she realized how she had changed, despite all her attempts to believe the contrary. Most of her life had now become a repetition of the same ritual. The morning

bath. The tea hour with the newspaper, the two hours at the typewriter. She had become a creature of habit. She, who had always been open to the impulse of the moment!

She picked up her tray and walked down to the jetty. It was still early, there was not a ripple on the lake. Nature held its breath. The vain birch trees mirrored themselves in the water, and big, glittering shoals of fish took their morning swim in the rising sun. She took a deep breath, her being expanded and she was filled with the nature that surrounded her, seized with love, as if a secret had just manifested itself: the meaning of life.

She was still lost in her dreams when her neighbour came out into the garden and slowly hoisted her flag.

The Swedish flag - blue and yellow, against the blue sky. She thought the Swedish flag was beautiful, to her it meant something bright and cheerful. Summer, safety, Sweden. She herself hoisted it on holidays, perhaps she should do it today as well.

'How Swedish you are,' her friends teased her. 'Do you feel as Swedish as all that?'

'What else? I have spent the whole of my adult life in Sweden. I am Jewish and I am Swedish. But still, I don't think I would say so, if a Swede asked me. In spite of it all I don't believe the Swedes regard me as Swedish and I am much too frightened of being rejected. When I received my Swedish citizenship I thought I was Swedish, but only for a short time. After that I realized that perhaps the third generation of immigrants, if that, can hope to be accepted as Swedes. We came here as guests but we were soon being called 'foreigners'. Some years later the term changed to 'refugees', which I thought would change again to 'Swedes', when at last, after seven years, we received the desired Swedish nationality. But today I know that I shall never be anything but an 'immigrant'.

The sun was delightfully warm, she stretched out on the reclining chair and indulged herself in simply existing. The telephone rang.

'Hallo.'

'Hi, this is Bella. I wanted to congratulate you on your birthday.'

'Thank you, fancy your remembering after all these years.'

She had long since forgiven the girl she had been jealous of because she had once invited Marton out, and now she was glad to hear Bella's voice. She had not been in touch often over the years. Beautiful, heedless Bella, who during her time as a domestic had thrown her mistress's pants into the dustbin, had married, and become a good housewife, but unfortunately her marriage had not lasted.

'How are you?'

'So so. I can't get rid of my pains, and the doctors can't understand what causes them. I'm not sleeping any better, either.'

'Are you still plagued with nightmares?'

'As soon as I go to sleep I see Mengele's face in front of me. Every night I see the dead bodies lying in heaps, every night I feel the blows on my own head. It's never going to stop.'

'How are things with your daughter?'

'Good, I hope. She doesn't bother about me, I scarcely ever see her.'

'But you see your grandchildren?'

'Not much. They are busy with their lessons and friends.'

'And Sven? Are you in touch at all?'

'No, it's a long time since I saw him. They say he's married again.'

'What do you do all day?'

'I don't know. The days pass doing nothing. In the morning I wait for it to be evening. In the evening, for night to be over. I potter about. I switch on the radio, I turn it off - I feel very lonely.'

'Isn't there anything that makes you happy?'

'What could there be? I often wonder why I survived. To survive and not to belong with anyone, not to know who I am any more. I'm not Hungarian, I'm not Swedish, I'm not Jewish either. When I married Sven I wanted to forget all the old stuff, the children would be Swedish, they would never need to feel persecuted, so I never kept up the Jewish traditions, and now I'm here alone, abandoned by everyone, even by myself.'

'You mustn't think like that.'

'But it is so. And now they've begun to let gas into my room.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Oh yes, it's true. I can smell gas as soon as I wake up, that's why I always have a headache. I've already complained to the caretaker - I hope he can help me.'

'Are you sure it isn't just a headache?'

'Absolutely certain. I recognize the smell of gas.'

'I still think you should go to a doctor.'

'No doctor can help me.'

Was Bella suffering from paranoia?

A little later Sara rang. Now she too was retired, her children had left home, and although the sisters did not meet as often as before, they kept in daily contact by telephone. Sara had been unable to get rid of her sick jealousy, and it had gradually turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Anders and she were now divorced and Sara had accepted her fate.

'How are you?' she asked, after thanking Sara for her congratulations.

'I'm all right. But Carla is dying.'

'How sad. But what can we expect at our age?'

'She's only sixty-five.'

'Sixty-five - seventy-five - what difference does it make? It comes to us all. What happened?'

'She had a brain haemorrhage.'

'Then it's best for her if she does die. Just think of lying there like a cabbage.'

'But she's so afraid of death, and I can sympathize with that.'

'Why so? It's death that gives life its meaning. Remember how everything gets so much more important when we know that it may stop at any moment. Just think of living for ever, how dreary that would be! Life in Shangri-la would be quite unbearable.'

'What do you mean? Wouldn't it be marvellous to be young for ever, never to lose the people we love?'

'Think about it. Young for ever? Do you really miss your youth? My youth was the worst time of my life. Even if we ignore the circumstances, the war, the persecution, think how difficult it was just to exist, to cope with oneself, to get on with other people. No, never in life, I never want to be young again. Everything is so much simpler now. Things are not so important. I can make a fool of myself without the world collapsing. Getting old is like climbing up a mountain. Woods and villages shrink, bit by bit everything further down gets smaller, and the higher you get, the further you can see. You are less and less bothered by the storms down there in the valley, what is happening gradually loses its importance.'

'I can accept that we get older, but not that we disappear.'

'So what? Others will take over. Life goes on.'

'Exactly, life goes on for other people, not for me. That's just what I'm objecting to. Being left out, not being able to join in any more, not knowing what's going on, what progress, what discoveries are being made.'

'And what wars are being waged... Isn't it nice to know that we can escape all the misery, that the next war won't concern us, that the evil which goes on and on demanding its victims will no longer affect us?'

'Why do you think evil is going to go on, why don't you believe the time has come for a world at peace?'

'How can you be such an optimist? Man has murdered his brother ever since Cain and Abel. Why do you think they're suddenly going to stop? Don't you remember our old Latin teacher at school, whose favourite phrase was that man is his neighbour's wolf? Our endless discussions, when we didn't want to accept his homo homini lupus, we preferred to believe in Rousseau's goodwill. Where did that get us? Hasn't life taught us that the Latin teacher was right?'

'Do you mean that mankind is evil?'

'No, I wouldn't want to claim that so categorically. I believe the evil is inside us all, side by side with the good, and from time to time every one of us is faced with a choice. We can choose to cling to the good, or to give way to evil. But no one wants to admit that he can be evil. That makes it so much easier to say: It's him over there who is evil. I only want the good. It's the Jew, the gypsy, the one who is different, he's the one who wants to destroy me. And then we can go on feeling satisfied and good when we fight and murder in order to wipe out "evil", taking "the end justifies the means" as our watchword.'

'I don't think you're right. Look back and think of the people who risked their lives helping others. Mrs János, who slipped into the ghetto with food, the German guard who saved Mimmi's life. The farmer who hid Jews from the Nazis. Weren't they good all through?'

'That only confirms what I was saying. They were the ones who were able to control their evil inclinations, the ones who understood that an evil deed would only lead to more evil deeds, just as a good deed brings others in its train. You remember what the farmer said when you asked him why he had hidden the Jews?'

'He said it was the natural thing to do.'

'And do you also remember what the German war criminals said in Nuremberg?'

'That they were just obeying orders.'

'There you are. Evil happens outside us, evil deeds can only be committed by others. We are well-meaning, good people, respected breadwinners and members

of the community who simply obey orders. While the helpful farmer who refused to choose evil risked his life and was prepared to end up outside the community.'

'I can't talk any more now. Bye-bye.'

Can't talk, or won't think? As she put down the receiver she was reminded of Oscar Wilde's story of the swallow which stayed through the winter with his friend the bronze statue, in 'The Happy Prince'. When the swallow landed on the prince's hat and began to think of the approaching cold: 'Thinking always made him fall asleep.' Thinking is strenuous. It's easier to stay in line, follow John, keep up with the Joneses.

Edit arrived with a bunch of flowers for her birthday. She was glad of the early visit, which gave them a chance to talk before the others came. Edit's once so beautiful face was now worn by the years, the once lovely, wavy blonde hair was now grey and cut short.

'Lovely to see you. How are you?' she asked.

'So so,' said Edit. 'My heart is troublesome, my legs are on strike, otherwise I'm all right.'

'What do you mean, have you got heart failure?'

'There must be something wrong, although the doctor can't seem to pin it down. I find it difficult to walk, as you see I've begun to use a stick. And just now I'm getting chest pains.'

'What does the doctor say?'

'They can't find anything obvious, recently they said it might be just wear and tear, or rheumatism. They don't know anything, in spite of all the progress in the medical field. The fact is that I only manage by using painkillers.'

'And Tomas, how are things with him?'

'As usual. He lives on his island in one corner of the room, I on mine. Sometimes we watch the same TV programme, sometimes we eat at the same table. He has his infirmities to take care of, I have mine.'

'So nothing has changed?'

'No, why should you think so?'

'You haven't divorced...'

'I started to think about it - but it would mean so many complications.

Who has the energy for that?'

'What do the children say?'

'Not a lot. They are busy with their own things, they haven't much time to bother about how old Mum is getting on. Sometimes they ask why we got married - and I wonder too.'

'Have you forgotten how much in love you were?'

'I was never in love. I scarcely know what it means. I just wanted to live a normal life and I thought if I married the man who claimed to love me, everything would be all right.'

'But the children make you happy?'

'They scarcely ever come to see me and they don't often ring. When I ring up they are always in a hurry. Sometimes I think they're ashamed of me. The grandchildren are growing up like strangers, everything has gone wrong. What was the point of surviving?'

Their conversation ended as so often before. However hard she tried, she could not find a consoling word, but simply got depressed herself.

Now it was evening and the birthday celebrations were over. Children and grandchildren who had come to celebrate with her had gone, and she breathed a sigh of relief and at the same time of loss. This duality, the longing for her grandchildren and her irritation with them, still provoked by their parents' method of upbringing. As soon as she thought about it, she knew in her heart of hearts that they were right, but instinctively she found it difficult to react otherwise. She remembered her own childhood, all the times she had cried in secret and promised herself that she would never be harsh with her children. And yet she had repeated the same mistakes, with the same inner compulsion, as so many generations before her. Her children, on the other hand, who had

a better understanding of the meaning of the word 'upbringing', seemed to have been able to break with that compulsion. The grandchildren had greater freedom, their parents respected their wishes. A parent's respect for a child had been something quite unknown and impossible in her day. What was it her mother used to say when as a child she wanted something? 'You don't want anything. I am the one who wants. When you grow up, that's when you can want.' But to want is also something one has to learn. If one has not learned it as a child it is difficult to do so as an adult.

Everything had gone wrong. She had lost contact with her former friends, but her period of isolation had been followed by a longing for company. Then, when she met people, she grew irritated and longed to be back in her solitude. She had become a real loner and had both welcomed it and been tormented by it. It was only now that she understood what Baudelaire meant in his lines: 'Oh Mort, vieux capitain, venez, levons l'ancre,' (Oh death, you old captain, come, let us weigh anchor.) Was that what she longed for?

On her way to the bedroom she stopped by the bookcase to look for a book. It was best to have something on the bedside table in case she woke up too early. Beside the Swedish and English books were a few Hungarian authors, some old companions. She pulled out the Hungarian classic Madách: 'The Human Tragedy' and smiled reminiscently, remembering literature lessons at school with Lenke, their idolised teacher, who used to read aloud from the book. He had seen to it that his pupils never forgot the last line: 'Ember küzdj es bizva bizzal,' (Man, you must fight and hope with confidence). What could that have meant to her during the difficult years - an unconscious incentive? Perhaps. But now she also remembered an evening in Stockholm, another classic, another experience. She had been at the theatre and seen a play by Beckett. In a flash the truth had come to her: that's how it is, life is cruel, and nothing will get better in any way. There is nothing to hope for, hope always ends in disappointment. Beckett was suddenly revealed as the prophet who dared to show life as it was

and who did not, like so many others, deceive his public by awakening false hopes. Paradoxically it consoled her. By accepting hopelessness she had gained a feeling of control over her fate. The pain took on a somewhat masochistic tinge which gave her the right not to fight it.

Much had happened since then, and today when she looked back on the past seventy-two years she no longer agreed with Beckett. Life had shown so many faces, offered so many surprises, a box on the ear when she least expected it, and happiness when she no longer believed in it. Life had been like a roller coaster, now up, now down, never straight ahead. Sometimes she had been at the very bottom of the darkest well, sometimes high up among the clouds.

SYNTHESIS

It was evening when the plane glided down on to the runway. The floodlights were reflected in the wet asphalt, while the sound of the engines died away. The passengers gathered their belongings, got up, opened the baggage compartments, and more and more of them began to leave the aircraft.

She sat where she was, as if still hoping to avoid getting out, avoid the meeting with Hamburg, the town that awakened so many tragic memories. The aircraft was almost empty when at last she made up her mind, collected her bag and walked towards the exit. Her thoughts were circling round tomorrow's conference, and while she waited by the carousel she decided to take a taxi to the hotel. It would be more expensive than the bus, of course, but she wanted to arrive as quickly as possible in order to read through tomorrow's speech.

With her suitcase in the trolley she had passed through Customs and was looking for a taxi, when a notice caught her eye: 'Airport bus to Hamburg Station'. Without really knowing why, she took a seat on the bus and was driven through the brightly lit streets. Hamburg was a beautiful city, by no means the heap of ruins that she remembered. She might have been in any big city that she was visiting for the first time. She looked around curiously, taking note of the city traffic, the fine, modern buildings and the brightly lit fun palaces along the bus route.

At the Central Station she alighted and stood a little way off by a pillar. Opposite her shone the neon-lit words 'Hamburger Hauptbahnhof'. It was early evening and there were a lot of people about, women on their way home from work stopping at the station supermarket to buy food for the evening, men with newly-bought evening papers in their hands, looking round at the entertainments on offer, some stopping at the advertising pillar. Now and then an eagerly gesticulating child passed by with an exhausted ^{adult} while she stared at the

traffic. Suddenly the picture changed. It was winter, twenty degrees below zero, and the thinly dressed girl in prison clothes with a bright yellow cross on her back stood at the street corner, shovelling snow. She shuddered, and time contracted as if through a haze.

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The icy wind sweeps round the young girl and the hands that hold the snow shovel are red and chapped. With each breath the air is filled with thick steam and her feet feel like lumps of ice. It is the middle of the day, and it will be a long time before the hungrily-desired moment when the whistle signals the 'cease-fire', the end of the working day. The people round about hurry to and from the trains, and the girl is dreaming of the watery but nevertheless hot soup, waiting in the barracks.

She looked at the young girl she had been fifty years ago and had difficulty in grasping the situation. What was happening? Who was who? Was it I who was looking at the girl, was it she who was looking at me? Am I she - is she me?

She pushed away the picture, took a taxi and forced herself to think about her speech while they were driving to the hotel. She would not go in search of the shipyard where the girl had hauled heavy sacks of cement, she would not look for the suburb where the SS men had kept her in the slave labour camp. She would not try to find the exact spot where the tram accident happened. She had come here simply to take part in a conference. No memories would be allowed to disturb her hard-won peace.

Once in the room she took out her notes and became absorbed in them, careful not to allow herself to be distracted by memories.

Next morning, as soon as she woke up, she put on the earphones of her portable tape recorder. Mozart had always been able to keep the distressing thoughts at bay. Then she got ready and went down to reception to ask the way to the conference. She gave herself scarcely time to eat breakfast, picked up her papers and walked, briefcase in hand, towards the exit. A man with a conference bag

swinging from his shoulder was leaving the hotel at the same time, and she assumed that he was a colleague on his way to the same conference. In that case they could keep each other company and she would not have to look for the right road.

'Do you know the way to the congress?'

'Yes, I was there yesterday.'

'Can we go together? I'm not sure of the way.'

'Of course, it's straight ahead.'

'Are you a psychiatrist?'

'No, I'm not a doctor. I'm a businessman. My interest in the congress is different.'

'Oh yes?'

'I want to hear the talk on genetics. I was a member of the Waffen SS for two years, and now I'm trying to understand myself.'

Pang. In that case he might as well know who I am, too.

'And I was slaving for eight months in a labour camp here in Hamburg.'

'No,' he said, stopping as if turned to stone. When he saw her walking on he followed her and began to explain eagerly:

'We were forced to. I was so young. I find it difficult to understand now, and I'm trying to get to grips with how it could happen. I'm trying to understand.'

How old had he been? Where had he been? What cruelties had he been guilty of? How had he been able to live with his own past? He seemed to feel a need to excuse himself, but still, he was one of those who questioned the evil. He must be one of the few who wanted to come to terms with the past, who had understood, though belatedly, that he had let evil take him over. Now he was looking for an explanation, he wanted to get to the bottom of it. If only everyone would do the same!

'You know, I've so often been asked: "What would you do if you met an SS man?" and I've always said "I don't know". Now I know.'

He was a year older than she was. He had been in the Waffen SS, had fought the Russians in the Baltic States. When it came to the point, she did not want to hear any details, she simply wanted to believe that he was one of those who had remembered and repented his blindness. It was the grandchildren's future she cared about: they must never be exposed to the kind of things she had experienced. And only those who come to terms with their past can guard against its happening again. If he were to be one of those you could count on, she was prepared to be his friend. That was the most important thing. The struggle against anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, had been the substance of her life ever since she had discovered that the evil had begun to spread about her once again.

'Even from my earliest childhood I had to learn to obey - so when I joined the Hitler Youth everything seemed obvious. I had learned never to question my parents or my teachers, everything they said was right and proper. All I had to do was to obey their words, their teaching.'

'Did you never try to think for yourself?'

'No, I had learned that older people knew best. I obeyed them blindly. There was only one time when I wondered, and that was when I was not allowed to visit my little sister in hospital. She was born with a misshapen foot, and my father said they were going to send her to a sanatorium. I missed her, longed for her to get well and come home again, but she never came back. I never found out what happened, and I didn't dare to ask, either. I must have realized that there was some secret here that was taboo. At the same time I was frightened of being sent away myself.'

'Did you love your sister?'

'Very much. She was the only person in the family you could hug. In our family feelings were never shown. We were hardened both physically and psychologically. In the morning we children had to wash in ice-cold water and we must never cry when father beat us. We had to be strong.'

'Didn't your mother ever hug you?'

'No, she was hard too. Whether it was because she was afraid of Father, or was like that herself, I don't know. I didn't dare show any weakness in front of her either. My sight was poor, and unconsciously I knew that was a weakness, At school I had difficulty in seeing what was on the blackboard, but I never dared tell the teacher. Many times I wished I could sit at the front but I knew that if I did my parents would also find out that my sight was poor. I was convinced that I would be sent away if they did. The teacher was always sending home comments about my being inattentive and not concentrating on the lessons, but I preferred a beating from Father to telling them what was wrong.'

That evening there was the official reception at the City Hall. A doctors' orchestra, consisting of grey-haired ladies and gentlemen showing obvious signs of efforts to hold on to their youth, welcomed the congress participants. They played Brahms.

The music struck hard at her heart and made it shrivel.

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The orchestra, in grey-striped prison clothes, was playing for us young girls who had just arrived by train and did not yet know where we were. The welcoming committee, tidily dressed women in rows of five, look at us with compassion, tears shining in their eyes. Why are they crying? Why is the orchestra wearing striped clothes? I smell a pervasive odour coming from the chimney in the background. Is this the factory where we are to work? Where are we? What is going to happen to us? Why could we not stay with our parents? SS soldiers with dogs, weeping children, Maria's voice...

'I say, do you think I could play in the orchestra?'

The senator's thunderous voice, greeting the congress participants, woke her up. What was it she had been thinking of just then?

The afternoon train journey by underground to Altona. The red warehouses along the Elbe, which looked like the camp in Wilhelmshaven, half a century earlier. The allotment gardens along the underground train tracks, with

broccoli stalks left there, the stalks which meant a little relief from the everlasting hunger, if only we dared to 'organize', in other words, steal. The name of a station: 'Veddel' - wasn't that the name of the second camp? Or was it Wedel? Or was the whole thing only a nightmare? '...that such atrocities must never happen again...' she suddenly heard the senator conclude.

Then it was not a bad dream. It had happened. Had it happened to me? Or to her? Was I her? Was she me? She still did not know.

The closing banquet was high-spirited, as the participants became more and more affected by the good food and drink. The orchestra began to play dance music and the grey-haired senator asked her to dance. She still loved dancing and enjoyed being able to follow his assured steps. He was a good dancer. The music was far too loud for them to talk, so when the dance ended they went out on to the terrace. The evening was calm and quiet, the traffic had died down now, and on the lamplit street there were only a few pedestrians hurrying by. The lamplight glittered on the dark river before them.

'Look how beautiful Hamburg is, look at all the lights. You would not believe that all this was lying in ruins only a short time ago.'

'Oh yes, I know.'

'How can you know that?'

'I was one of those who cleared up after the bombing as it happens.'

'That's not possible. You are Swedish.'

'Yes, it is possible. I am naturalized Swedish, I was born in Romania.'

'Were you in a concentration camp?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

'In the Hamburg area, among others. I tried to find those places today, but apart from a few traces which reminded me of the past, I saw nothing but modern suburbs.'

'Were you in Neuengamme?'

'No. But in other places around here, I don't remember the names.'

'Yes, I know, there were a whole lot of smaller labour camps administered by Neuengamme, all the old history is documented. There is said to be a tourist map of the Hamburg area, showing all the former camps. There are tours on Sundays for people who are interested. If you're still here on Sunday I can arrange for you to be on one of them.'

'No, I'm leaving tomorrow, but I would appreciate it if you could get me the map. Here is my address in Sweden, would you mind sending it to me?'

'Of course'.

'I would be grateful.'

In the morning she took the flight to Washington. She had been invited to Washington State University to give a lecture on the psychology of ageing, which seemed more than a coincidence. It provided a good opportunity to visit the new Holocaust Museum. Could she do it?

The Museum. Long queues. Waiting in the grey morning.

At the front of the ticket queue she is given a pass made out to Marina Schajev, born in Poland in 1942. The visitor is invited to identify with the former owner of the pass and to have the card stamped at three points during the tour through the Museum, to receive information on the girl's fate at different stages of the war. She does not want to know the details of how Marina Schajev was killed, has no intention of stamping the card, simply pushes it into her bag. She must not let thoughts of the past take hold. Must not awaken the horror. Must not remember. Simply turn the leaves of a book held a long way from her. Look at a distance, leaving feelings uninvolved.

She goes into the museum, begins the tour at the far end and takes note of the exhibition material. Photographs of a Germany before Hitler. Hitler's coming to power. Popular euphoria over the personality they still believe to be their help in time of need, the deliverer of whom they dream. The poison which begins to show - sporadic incidents still not regarded as serious: 'It will pass'.

She reads the captions under the big illustrations, everything very well done, very informative, she finds out many things she had not known. The slow growth of evil in the shadow of Hitler's hate-filled dream of the future. Now she sees how what happened was predicted from the beginning: 'Germany needs living space' - what does it mean if not war? 'If the Jews precipitate Germany into war again, they will be exterminated.' It is all there in black and white. Why had no one seen it? Why had no one heard it? Why do people always see and hear only what they want to see and hear?

Pictures from an idyllic world. Dozens of pictures of simple people in joy and sorrow. Wedding photographs of couples in love, breathing hope and belief in the future, who only a short time afterwards will be swept from the surface of the earth. A picture of a funeral with grieving people who themselves will never be mourned by anyone.

As the description of developments draws closer to the war it becomes more and more difficult to skim through it, to restrain her feelings. She slows down, and when she is suddenly standing beside the cattle truck - it is the young girl who steps inside.

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I sit down, close my eyes and hear Father's breathing beside me. 'Where are we going?' I wonder silently. I dare not ask the question, I know that no one can answer. I ^{hugged} ~~hug~~ my little sister who is trying to comfort my weeping mother with her naive conviction that we are on the way to do some farm work.

'Don't cry, ^{Mom} ~~Mamma~~,' she says. 'The war will soon be over and we shall be going home again. We're just going to help them a bit with the spring sowing. I'm big now, I can help too.'

'I shall be fifty in July,' says Father. 'What shall I say if they ask me? If I say I'm over fifty, perhaps I won't have to work.'

'No, Father, say you are under fifty. I think it's better to be allowed to work,' I say.

'You will see, it will be all right,' my little sister repeats.

Will it? I wonder to myself.

Now I remember - the Polish refugee who arrived in our little town at Easter 1941. What was it he told us? We did not want to believe him. 'A lively imagination,' said my uncle. Something about trainloads of Jews being shot? Gas-powered vehicles with exhaust pipes leading ~~back inside~~. Is that what awaits us?

It is hot and stuffy, the stink of the bucket in the corner is spreading. I am thirsty. The water is finished. I feel I can no longer stay upright.


I hear Mother crying as I sink deeper and deeper into something warm and soft. The voices become fainter and fainter, soon only my mother's weeping reaches me. I must comfort her. But how can I comfort her, when I know what awaits us? She will be murdered, I shall live. Live and feel guilty because I had not saved her. Because I let her cry, because I did not take off the dark shawl which made her look old, because I had failed her, because I survived. I am seized by violent weeping which blends with my mother's - and with her sobbing. Mother, she, I...Auschwitz, Stockholm, Sziváros...

The continuous ringing of a bell wakes me. I look up. I am alone in the cattle truck, it is closing time at the museum. I get up and can scarcely take a step. My whole body is painful and I have no strength left as I get into a taxi and am driven back to the hotel. I undress, lie down and fall immediately into a deep sleep.

Next morning it feels as if I had been through an earthquake, had done a whole day's work, had dug out piles of corpses. My whole body feels heavy and my head is empty. It is a long time before I realize where I am and what has happened. I am lying in bed in a hotel room in Washington, yesterday I was in the extermination camp in Auschwitz, and tomorrow I am going back to Stockholm.

My eyes fall on the angry red flashing light on the telephone: 'Press 5 for a message.' I press five and hear Adam's voice: 'I'll pick you up at twelve. I hope you've slept well.'

I listen once more and hear it clearly this time: 'I'll pick you up.' He, Adam, is picking me up. The man who came into her life so late and whom she has not been able to accept fully until now will be picking her up, picking me up. I, who was she, she who was I. It was not someone else, it was not in another life, it was I who was the young girl fifty years ago, who sat in the cattle truck on the way to hell. It was I who was robbed of everything and everyone I loved, my parents, my home, my youth. It was I, Hanna Haller, who by a miracle survived, married, made a family and was robbed once again of my tender new roots. Death, without the assistance of evil this second time, had once again sent my memory flying, made me feel I was no longer the same person. After yesterday's events, my life's fragmented carpet stands before me in bright colours and only now can I see what has happened without being seized by the feeling that it is about someone else. Suddenly everything fell into place and I reached out my hand for the telephone to ring Adam.

Adam has meant a great deal to me ever since we met. Nevertheless he has had to be content with only half of me during the five years we have known each other. He is so much younger, and he has given me so much during those years without my being able to give anything back. There has always been an invisible wall between us, though I never knew what it meant. Now it has fallen, and I am in a hurry to tell him that I am going to be able to give him, unreservedly, the few years I can expect to live now. Henceforth I shall not be losing track of myself when we are together, or when I look at old pictures. Nor when I take the train, or  walk in my thoughts through bombed-out Hamburg. Now when I looked in the glass I could see the ageing Hanna at the same time as I could also see the young Hanna. The two pictures melted together and I could hold in one piece everything that had happened both before and after the two great catastrophes of my life. The circle was closed.

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